

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 437 376

SP 038 962

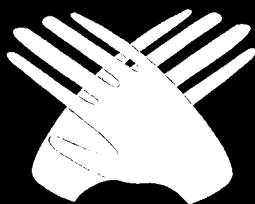
AUTHOR Ammon, Mary Sue, Ed.  
TITLE Joining Hands: Preparing Teachers To Make Meaningful Home-School Connections.  
INSTITUTION California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, Sacramento.; California State Dept. of Education, Sacramento.  
SPONS AGENCY ARCO Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.; California Education Roundtable.; California Univ., Berkeley. Office of the President.  
ISBN ISBN-0-8011-1442-X  
PUB DATE 1999-00-00  
NOTE 129p.  
AVAILABLE FROM California Department of Education, CDE Press, Sales Office, P.O. Box 271, Sacramento, CA 95812-0271 (\$13.25 plus shipping and handling). Tel: 988-995- 4099; Fax: 916-323-0823.  
PUB TYPE Collected Works - General (020) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC06 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Cognitive Development; Constructivism (Learning); Cultural Awareness; Cultural Differences; Diversity (Student); Elementary Secondary Education; \*Family Involvement; Higher Education; \*Parent Participation; \*Parent School Relationship; \*Parent Teacher Cooperation; Preservice Teacher Education; Sociocultural Patterns; Student Teacher Attitudes; Student Teachers  
IDENTIFIERS California

## ABSTRACT

This document describes the work of several universities to make teacher-family partnerships a high priority in teacher preparation. The case studies of several successful programs demonstrate that teacher preparation programs can undertake various approaches to help teachers develop the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their partnership roles with families. The six chapters are: "Introduction: Many Hands, Multiple Voices" (Mary Sue Ammon); "Preparing Constructivist Teachers for Parent Involvement: The Developmental Teacher Education Program" (Paul Ammon and Della Peretti); "Preparing Teachers to Serve Children and Families with Diverse Backgrounds" (Marianne D'Emidio-Caston); "Preparing Teachers to Connect Home and School: Learning About the Sociocultural Contexts of Teaching and Learning" (Paula F. Levin); "Family Involvement in Education: The Apprehensions of Student Teachers" (Peg Hartmann Winkelmann); and "Preparing Educational Leaders to Work Effectively with Families: The Parent Power Project" (Deanna Evans-Schilling). (SM)

# Joining Hands

Preparing Teachers  
to Make  
Meaningful  
Home-School  
Connections



California Department of Education  
California Commission on Teacher  
Credentialing

Sacramento, 1999

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND  
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS  
BEEN GRANTED BY

*Sam W. Swafford*

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES  
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement  
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION  
CENTER (ERIC)

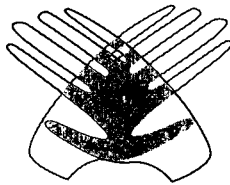
- ☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# Joining Hands

Preparing Teachers  
to Make  
Meaningful  
Home-School  
Connections



Edited by  
**Mary Sue Ammon**



## Publishing Information

*Joining Hands: Preparing Teachers to Make Meaningful Home-School Connections* was developed as a result of a project sponsored by the University of California and the California Department of Education Joint Subcommittee on Parent Involvement. Mary Sue Ammon designed the layout and formatted the manuscript. The cover and chapter dividers were designed by Cheryl McDonald, CDE Press, California Department of Education. Janet Lundin and Ed O'Malley, also from the CDE Press, provided insightful assistance with the editing of this publication. *Joining Hands* was published by the Department, 721 Capitol Mall, Sacramento, California (mailing address: P.O. Box 944272, Sacramento, CA 94244-2720). It was distributed under the provisions of the Library Distribution Act and *Government Code* Section 11096.

© 1999 by the California Department of Education  
All rights reserved

ISBN 0-8011-1442-X

This publication, in its entirety, is available on the Web site of the California Department of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/>.

## Ordering Information

Copies of this publication are available for \$13.25 each, plus shipping and handling charges. California residents are charged sales tax. Orders may be sent to the California Department of Education, CDE Press, Sales Office, P.O. Box 271, Sacramento, CA 95812-0271; FAX (916) 323-0823. Current information on prices, credit card purchases, and shipping and handling charges may be obtained by calling the Sales Office at (800) 995-4099.

An illustrated *Educational Resources Catalog* describing publications, videos, and other instructional media available from the Department can be obtained without charge by writing to the address given above or by calling the Sales Office at (916) 445-1260.



Prepared for publication  
by CSEA members.

# Contents

Preface .....	iv
Acknowledgments .....	v
Introduction: Many Hands, Multiple Voices .....	1
<i>Mary Sue Ammon</i>	
Preparing Constructivist Teachers for Parent Involvement: The Developmental Teacher Education Program .....	16
<i>Paul Ammon and Della Peretti</i>	
Preparing Teachers to Serve Children and Families with Diverse Backgrounds .....	37
<i>Marianne D'Emidio-Caston</i>	
Preparing Teachers to Connect Home and School: Learning About the Sociocultural Contexts of Teaching and Learning .....	60
<i>Paula F. Levin</i>	
Family Involvement in Education: The Apprehensions of Student Teachers .....	79
<i>Peg Hartmann Winkelman</i>	
Preparing Educational Leaders to Work Effectively with Families: The Parent Power Project .....	101
<i>Deanna Evans-Schilling</i>	

# Preface

Teachers and parents are at the center of an excellent education for every child. Traditionally, the work of teachers has been initiated and guided by teachers themselves within the confines of a classroom or a school. By and large, teachers' energies continue to be self-directed and focused in the classroom, but the need to improve schools and to help all students meet challenging content and performance standards calls on teachers to look beyond traditional roles.

Teachers, working with parents, administrators, board members, and others, are implementing standards in a range of subjects, rewriting curriculum and assessments to reflect the new standards, and establishing support systems for both teachers and learners so that all students can reach the standards. Increasingly, teachers are fostering rich mutual relationships between families and schools to help students succeed.

This document, *Joining Hands: Preparing Teachers to Make Meaningful Home-School Connections*, describes the pioneering work of a few universities to make teacher-family partnerships a high priority in teacher preparation. The case studies in this report demonstrate that teacher preparation programs can undertake a variety of approaches to help teachers develop the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their partnership roles with families. The experiences and important insight of the participants in the case studies will contribute greatly to eventually opening the physical and psychological doors of schools to all students, families, and communities.

DELAINE EASTIN  
*Superintendent of Public Instruction  
California Department of Education*

SAM SWOFFORD  
*Executive Director  
California Commission on Teacher  
Credentialing*

SONIA HERNANDEZ  
*Deputy Superintendent  
Curriculum and Instructional Leadership  
Branch  
California Department of Education*

STUART GREENFELD  
*Assistant Superintendent and Director  
Secondary Education Division  
California Department of Education*

ROBERT CERVANTES  
*Manager  
Academic Support Unit  
Secondary Education Division  
California Department of Education*

# Acknowledgments

*Joining Hands: Preparing Teachers to Make Meaningful Home-School Connections* was developed and published through the financial support of the Intersegmental Coordinating Committee, the operating arm of the California Education Round Table; the University of California Office of the President; the Academic Support Unit, Secondary Education Division, Curriculum and Instructional Leadership Branch, and the Learning Support and Partnerships Division, Child, Youth, and Family Services Branch, California Department of Education; the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing; and the ARCO Foundation.

Appreciation is extended to Maria Reyes, Consultant, California Department of Education for her long-term support and efforts on behalf of the project and to the other members of the UC-CDE Joint Subcommittee on Parent Involvement, especially to Chairman Henry L. Alder, for their vision. Special thanks go to Mary Vixie Sandy, Joseph Dear, and David Wright from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

Finally, gratitude is expressed to Paul Ammon, Marianne D'Emidio-Caston, Deanna Evans-Schilling, Paula F. Levin, Della Peretti, and Peg Hartmann Winkelman. These teacher educators enthusiastically volunteered to develop pilot projects and to write about their efforts toward preparing prospective teachers to work effectively with families even before this partnership became an adopted standard for all teachers as a result of legislation (Assembly Bill 1264, Chapter 767, Statutes of 1993).



# Introduction: Many Hands, Multiple Voices

Mary Sue Ammon  
University of California, Berkeley

**The objectives of this project have been to document the ways in which teacher educators translated their intentions to increase family involvement preparation into changes in their programs and then to invite dialogue and reflection about these efforts.**

**T**eacher educators share a common goal with school personnel, policymakers, and parents. They want schools to help children learn, grow, and develop into educated, responsible, and caring adults. Almost all of them also recognize that, to accomplish this goal, families need to be involved in and supportive of education, and educators need to know how to promote family involvement and build on what parents do. Yet, for the most part, institutions of higher education have been slow to invest time, effort, and imagination in the preparation of teachers for partnerships with the families of their prospective students. A number of factors are responsible for this gap in teacher preparation for family involvement. Interestingly,



#### About the Author

**Mary Sue Ammon** has been project coordinator for the UC-CDE Project on Enhancing Teacher Preparation for Parent Involvement since its inception. Since receiving her doctorate in developmental and cognitive psychology, Mary Sue has worked on projects concerned with parent involvement in education, parent education, language and literacy development, and service-learning at the University of California, Berkeley. She was a member of the Assembly Bill 1264 Task Force and the primary author of its report, *Preparing Educators for Partnerships with Families*.

**There has been a lack of clarity about where, when, and by whom teachers should be taught about family involvement.**

these difficulties parallel problems encountered by schools in implementing programs supporting collaboration with families.

Just as there has been ambiguity about the responsibilities of educators and parents in schools, so too has there been a lack of clarity about where, when, and by whom teachers should be taught about family involvement. Just as various teachers, administrators, and parents have had different views, expectations, and attitudes about parent involvement, so also the two groups primarily responsible for teacher education and development (universities and school districts) have had different ideas about what teachers at different stages of their careers need to know and be able to do with regard to family involvement. Just as there are practical obstacles at school and in the home in establishing effective partner-

ships between families and educators, so also have there been structural and administrative roadblocks at the university and in school districts in creating cohesive, comprehensive, and coordinated programs of professional preparation and development in the family-school partnership area.

Perhaps the most basic factor responsible for the lack of attention to teacher preparation for family involvement has been the time it has taken to recognize the centrality of teachers' skills and practices in the effective realization of family-school partnerships. Over the past 30 years, as the potential benefits of family involvement became apparent, policymakers tried to encourage more comprehensive roles for parents in education by mandating the development of parent involvement policies in schools or specific forms of parent involvement, such as parent advisory committees, site councils, or family-school compacts. It has become increasingly clear, however, that official policies and regulations such as these were not, by themselves, transforming schools. Joyce Epstein and her colleagues were among the first researchers to show that teachers' practices make a fundamental

**Most educators still have had little or no training in family involvement.**

difference in whether parents are productive partners with schools (Epstein, 1991; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein & Scott-Jones, 1988).

Educator preparation is now more commonly recognized as a key element in bridging the gap between the consensus for family-school collaboration and the reality of this cooperation occurring in schools. Yet most educators still have had little or no training in family involvement. Coverage of the topic in preservice teacher education has been, for the most part, either nonexistent or nonsystematic. According to a recent study by the Harvard Family Research Group, the training that does exist is often traditional in definition, teaching methods, and delivery (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). In California none of the current "Standards of Program Quality and Effectiveness" for multiple-subject and single-subject teaching credentials directly mentions preparation for involvement and collaboration with families.

In educator credentialing programs this lack of attention to preparing teachers for family involvement has now also begun to change. Requirements for collaboration with families have appeared in each of the frameworks recently adopted by prominent national and statewide projects working on standards for teacher education, licensing, and certification. In 1993 the California Legislature passed Assembly Bill 1264, formally initiating a review by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) of standards and requirements pertinent to the preparation of educators to serve as active partners with families in the education of students in California. During the next year the CTC formed a task force to make suggestions for standards, both to the advisory panel that was conducting a comprehensive review of teacher credentialing and to those reviewing requirements for other certificated personnel. In the report of the AB 1264 task force (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 1996), an expanded definition of family-school partnerships is linked to a discussion of desired outcomes of educator preparation in this area.

Yet new credentialing standards and lists of desired outcomes by themselves cannot solve the problem of inadequate partnership preparation. Those engaged in teacher training and professional development need better information about *how* to help educators develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they will need to collaborate successfully with families and communities. And more practical insights are needed regarding ways in which teacher preparation programs and school districts might collaborate to achieve the desired outcomes for teacher development. In 1989, aware of the crucial gap in teacher education for parent involvement, the University of California (UC)–California Department of Education (CDE) Joint Subcommittee on Parent Involvement (JSPI) initiated a collaborative project with teacher educators on eight UC campuses to develop meaningful components on parent involvement in their teacher preparation programs.

## **The California Project to Enhance Teacher Preparation for Parent Involvement**

Impressed by the wealth of research on the importance of parental involvement in children's education, the UC Committee on Undergraduate Preparatory and Remedial Education in partnership with the CDE created the joint subcommittee in 1986 to consider projects to which the combined expertise of UC and CDE professionals could contribute. JSPI's basic strategy was to serve in conjunction with other organizations and educational institutions as a catalyst and facilitator of family involvement projects.

During its eight-year period of service, the subcommittee initiated a wide range of innovative educational projects, including a model parent hotline; regional parent involvement conferences; and publications for parents, teachers, and educational leaders. The joint subcommittee was also convinced that a high priority should be placed on improving teacher preparation for parent involvement. Consequently, in 1989 it launched a collaborative project with teacher educators in schools and departments of education in the University of California system to facilitate the incorporation of family involvement content into teacher preparation programs.

**The assumptions of the project were that components of teacher preparation programs should be evolutionary, contextualized, and multidimensional.**

A unique aspect of the California Project to Enhance Teacher Preparation for Parent Involvement was that it moved beyond talking about what should happen in preservice teacher education to actually encouraging the accomplishment of goals in family involvement preparation. The assumptions of the project were that components of teacher preparation programs should be *evolutionary, contextualized, and multidimensional*. Underlying the first of these assumptions was the belief that teacher education programs did not need to “start big” or to have completely formulated approaches to family involvement preparation in order for program planners to begin to gain significant insights about the type of teacher education activities that were productive. The second assumption acknowledged that if family involvement components were to work and be maintained, they needed to be adapted to the structural constraints and theoretical orientations of the particular teacher preparation programs. A further assumption was that there would be many meaningful ways to prepare teachers for collaborating with families so that encouraging different approaches would also be beneficial in terms of the insights attained.

As a first step in this project, teams of UC teacher educators along with representatives from The California State University (CSU), in-service training programs, teachers, administrator organizations, and community groups were invited to a conference held at the University of California, Berkeley, in April 1989.<sup>1</sup> The goals of this first conference were to provide UC teacher educators with background knowledge about research and practice in family involvement and to stimulate thinking about how relevant information and experiences could be provided to students in teacher education programs. After presentations were given by noted researchers and practitioners in the family involvement area and small-group discussions were held, teams of teacher educators brainstormed ideas to improve the partnership preparation of preservice teachers and other school staff.

During the next year UC teacher educators tried some of these strategies on their campuses. In 1990 a smaller follow-up confer-

ence was held so that representatives from the campuses could share experiences and ideas for elaborating and improving the activities for parent involvement preparation that had been developed during that first year. Another focus of this second meeting was the examination of family involvement issues that teacher educators reported as being especially challenging, both to them and their students. At the end of the second conference, participants agreed to continue to develop their individual ideas and approaches and committed themselves to documenting their experiences and sharing their insights with other teacher educators.

From 1993 to 1997, during various professional meetings and conferences, groups of these teacher educators presented their ideas and experiences and initiated dialogues with practitioners and other teacher educators. A subgroup of six UC and CSU teacher educators extended this commitment to dissemination by preparing the set of case reports in this publication that reflect their successes, disappointments, insights, and unanswered questions related to the preparation of teachers for family involvement. These chapters, though now fixed in written form, do not represent final conclusions about approaches for preparing teachers for family-school collaboration. As the succeeding pages will show, these authors stress how their understanding is still evolving and growing. Still, their case reports reveal some common themes and important insights that should be useful to others developing programs of professional education and development.

## Different Voices, Common Themes

Three topics receive special focus in the chapters that follow:

1. The integration of family involvement with curriculum and teaching practices
2. The connection of family involvement to efforts to meet the needs of a diverse student population
3. The need to increase teachers' awareness of personal attitudes, feelings, and values related to family involvement

These areas of emphasis might not seem surprising, given the amount of time spent preparing credential candidates to teach subject matter, given the need for California teachers to learn ways to implement learning experiences for diverse student populations, and given the natural interest of most young adults in the development of personal goals and values. However, these focal areas and the methods used by these teacher educators *do* depart in many ways from those that have traditionally been employed to present parent involvement content (cf. Shartrand, et al., 1997).

### **Collaboration of Families in Teaching and Learning**

The views of teaching and learning held by many of these teacher educators led them to sense the importance of helping their student teachers connect families to the basic activity of education—the teaching of curriculum and day-to-day interacting with children about learning. The chapter by Ammon and Peretti makes explicit the connection between family involvement in education and definitions of learning in constructivist theory, the framework guiding the Developmental Teacher Education (DTE) Program. In her chapter Levin explicates a sociocultural perspective in describing the rationale for her emphasis on teachers learning about and making instructional use of the broader set of contexts of student learning. Starting with the goals generated by theoretical frameworks such as these, teacher educators in this project encouraged their students to:

- Develop skills in communicating with families about teaching and learning.
- Involve parents in learning activities at home.
- Connect parents and the home culture to learning at school.

Definitions of teaching contained in new national and state-wide frameworks specify that teachers should be able to communicate with families about teaching and learning. Communication with families is often described as the most basic form of parent involvement. Teachers need to learn ways to describe their teach-

**Communication with families is often described as the most basic form of parent involvement.**

**A short-term but intensely personal connection with a single family can also contribute to a teacher's feeling of efficacy in communicating and collaborating with parents.**

ing goals and methods and to develop techniques and skill in informing families about the educational progress of their children. Yet it has often been suggested that this type of family involvement preparation is best postponed until teachers are engaged in full-time teaching. However, Winkelman's observations imply that if teachers do not start early in their training to develop skill in listening to parents' spoken and unspoken messages and learn to translate goals for teaching and learning into understandable terms, they may later avoid communication with families because of insecurity about their teaching, fear of negative interactions, or mistaken expectations of families' abilities and interests. Moreover, as Winkelman suggests, the attitudes and skills required for teachers to be effective communicators are neither learned quickly nor developed easily without support from peers and mentors. Like Winkelman, D'Emidio-Caston shows how parent conference role-playing can have a greater impact if the activity is linked to difficult communications situations actually experienced in student teaching. Evans-Schilling's project demonstrates how a short-term but intensely personal connection with a single family can also contribute to a teacher's feeling of efficacy in communicating and collaborating with parents.

Traditional communication about teaching and learning places families in a receptive, passive role in which they only hear about school programs, curricula, or the achievement and behavior of their children. Yet significant payoffs for parents and students appear to accrue from teachers involving parents in helping their children with learning activities at home (Epstein, 1991; Leler, 1983). All five chapters, but especially those of Ammon and Peretti, Levin, and Evans-Schilling, describe examples of credential candidates gaining hands-on experience in extending school learning into the home and community. These reports also provide clues about ways to counteract negative expectations that teachers may have about what parents are willing, able, and likely to do in relation to assisting their children's learning. Moreover, the chapters by Ammon and Peretti and by Levin describe instances in



**Students need to go beyond reading, observation, and discussion of family involvement to individualized action.**

which student teachers learned how to make *two-way* connections between the classroom and home, using the ideas, insights, interests, and cultural richness of the family to enhance the school program and to create better points of contact between children's experiences at home and at school.

A few factors appear to increase the likelihood that student teachers will benefit from experiences designed to help them learn how to involve families in teaching and learning. All five chapters point out the importance of having students in small-group settings reflect on and then discuss and evaluate family involvement experiences. Most authors in this publication point out the benefits of providing students with multiple chances to think about and carry out communication and collaboration with parents. Berkeley's two-year DTE program was able to build such recursion into first- and second-year subject-matter classes and multiple student teaching placements. Levin's and Evans-Schilling's chapters suggest that undergraduates and preservice teachers can also profit from firsthand accounts or videotapes of the efforts of more experienced teachers. But Ammon and Peretti, Levin, and Evans-Schilling stress the need for students to go beyond reading, observation, and discussion of family involvement to individualized action. These chapters provide examples of students selecting home-school topics of personal interest and then constructing their own ways to improve the teaching and learning partnership.

### **Partnerships with Diverse Families and Communities**

Students in California bring to school diverse cultural perspectives, patterns of experience, and approaches to learning. As Ammon and Peretti and D'Emidio-Caston point out, a major challenge for teacher education is to address the discrepancy between the cultural and economic backgrounds of preservice teachers and those of the students they will be teaching. Although many new teaching frameworks specify the need for teachers to be able to design and implement learning experiences for diverse learners, there has been less emphasis and thought about the



**Although personal and social/cultural awareness is necessary, such cognizance will not by itself propel teachers to collaborate effectively with diverse families.**

implications of diverse beliefs, traditions, and values on the various forms of family involvement—communicating between the home and schools, involving families in learning at home or school, eliciting support for school programs, serving family needs, and involving families in decision making. However, all the authors of the chapters in this book consider the need to provide prospective teachers with experiences of diversity so that they will be better able both to serve different groups of children and to connect with the children's families and communities.

D'Emidio-Caston focuses attention on the fundamental issue of how to create an awareness of cultural diversity and shaping. She describes a variety of methods she has used to help teachers become aware of the ways in which their own cultural assumptions and life experiences influence the interpretation and understanding of events. Another important contribution of this chapter, and the one by Levin, is the insight that, although personal and social/cultural awareness is necessary, such cognizance will not by itself propel teachers to collaborate effectively with diverse families. These teacher educators suggest that personal contact and authentic interaction with families are also needed. For these steps to occur, D'Emidio-Caston asserts that teacher education programs will need to communicate, plan, and work more closely with kindergarten-through-grade-twelve schools.

Hands-on experience in working and talking with and teaching parents and other family and community members is important not only for the development of better communication skills and culturally appropriate curricula, as was discussed earlier, but also for the insight these activities give prospective teachers about the many ways in which parents can be a part of the educational process for each child. These teacher educators, therefore, found it useful to provide experiences in which parents are, themselves, seen in a teaching role. Evans-Schilling describes the powerful effect of her clinical field-based course on teachers' attitudes and expectations for various groups of parents and on teachers' subsequent willingness to provide all families with

**Student teachers need support and assistance in confronting diverse points of view and conflicting values.**

opportunities to contribute. Other chapters point to similar effects resulting from experiences with Family Math, home visits, or working with classroom volunteers.

The first three chapters also present assignments that were used to help precredential and preservice students learn about the school and community contexts of children's lives. Such personal experiences with the broader lives of families from other cultures were felt to be helpful in expanding student teachers' understanding of the role of family and community and the barriers between home and school. Often, as a result of these experiences, teachers moved away from overly simplistic, stereotypical, and ethnocentric views of other cultures. Community assignments also helped student teachers recognize not only the constraints but also the cultural strengths, natural support systems, and potential resources that families and communities bring to the schools. These teacher educators, however, warn that exposure to different communities is not enough. They show how student teachers need support and assistance in confronting diverse points of view and conflicting values. Finally, they point out that it is not just experience with diversity itself that generates understanding but reflection on such experiences as well.

### **Constructive Self-Awareness**

Frequently, teacher preparation for family involvement focuses on information about and illustrations of different types of family-school collaboration or on activities and strategies that teachers can employ to encourage parent involvement. What is often forgotten is the power of unexamined ideas, attitudes, and apprehensions about family involvement and the role that a teacher's sense of efficacy about family involvement plays in molding day-to-day relationships with families. The previous section, "Partnerships with Diverse Families and Communities," summarizes suggestions for increasing student teachers' awareness of multicultural issues. Winkelman's chapter primarily concerns a more general categorization of teachers' fears and contradictory

**Teacher educators should encourage and explicitly model risk-taking and improvisation in field projects with families.**

feelings about family involvement. She considers possible ways in which teacher educators might help student teachers acknowledge and work through their conflicting ideas and apprehensions about working with families, such as engaging student teachers in experiences that reveal contradictions, encouraging the expression of different points of view and using these responses as instructional entry points, encouraging continuing dialogue among students who share similar realities and challenges, and creating an environment that gives students opportunities to ask their own questions and to search for their own answers.

Another strategy for combating anxieties about family involvement discussed in all the chapters is for student teachers to view positive models of successful family involvement programs. Evans-Schilling makes two additional suggestions—that teacher educators should encourage and explicitly model risk taking and improvisation in field projects with families and that, when possible, programs should optimize the personal and emotional as well as the professional rewards for student teachers in such experiences. Ammon and Peretti highlight the fact that students come to credential programs with different degrees of readiness for parent involvement activities because of their previous background and experiences—especially in culturally and linguistically diverse settings. They suggest that preservice teacher education can deal with this disparity in teachers' readiness for connecting with families by designing program alternatives and options and by encouraging students to actively explore and engage in their own ways of involving families.

## **Effective Approaches to Partnership Preparation**

The discussions, reflections, and writing of teacher educators involved in the California Project to Enhance Teacher Preparation for Parent Involvement have provided helpful information about preparing new teachers to collaborate successfully with families. Perhaps the most useful insight that has emerged from this work is that planning by teacher educators must go beyond including such

**It is not the generic nature but the specific qualities of an activity that are important.**

activities as having students hear about or observe different types of family involvement, write newsletters to parents, role-play parent conferences, or walk around the community surrounding a school. In lists of “successful” and “unsuccessful” assignments contributed by participants in this project, such activities were characterized as *both* effective and ineffective. Obviously, it is not the generic nature but the *specific qualities* of an activity that are important. A set of suggestions adapted from Wood and Thompson’s (1993) principles of adult education serve well as a summary of many of the points discussed and illustrated in the ensuing chapters:

1. The goals and objectives of educating teachers about family involvement must be realistic and important.
2. The activities must be seen as relevant to the student teacher’s personal and professional needs.
3. The activities must be structured to provide support and reduce fear of judgment.
4. The student teacher must see the results of his or her efforts and receive structured, helpful feedback.
5. The student teacher needs opportunities for directed concrete experiences to apply what is being learned.
6. The approach should include learning in small groups so that the student teacher can share reflections and generalize from his or her experiences.
7. The approach should accommodate diversity in the experiences, knowledge, interests, and competencies of student teachers.
8. The approach should give student teachers control over the *how, why, when, and where* of learning.
9. The approach should reflect the concept that transfer of knowledge and skills is not automatic. The new teacher will need coaching and other kinds of follow up and support.

The ninth point is a reminder that preparation of teachers for family involvement cannot stop at the preservice level. Teacher

educators on college campuses need to encourage and participate in the development of teacher competence in creating partnerships with families *throughout* teachers' careers. All nine of these principles should be applicable not only to the design of preservice teacher education but also to the planning of induction programs and professional development programs for more experienced educators.

## Invitation to Participation

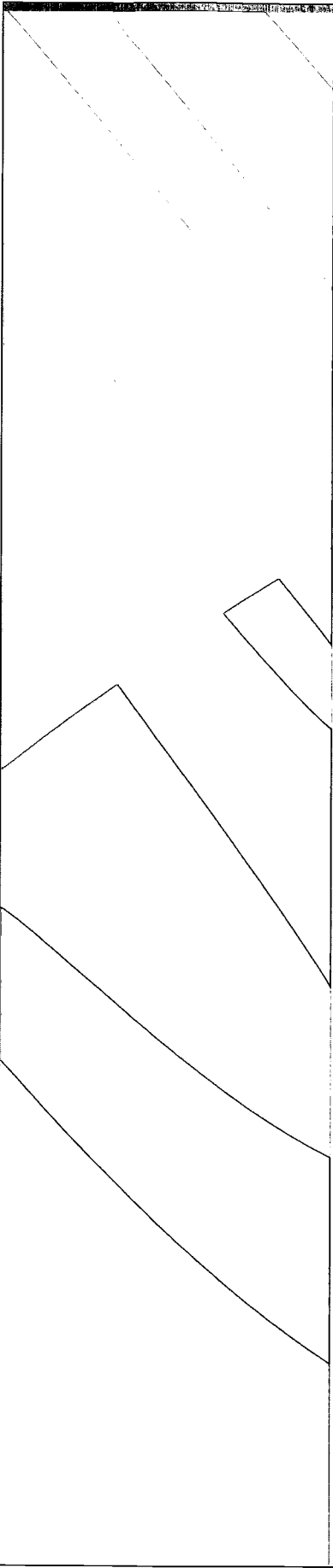
The objectives of this project have been to document the ways in which teacher educators translated their intentions to increase family involvement preparation into changes in their programs and then to invite dialogue and reflection about these efforts. Discussions generated from this project have already been helpful to advisory groups working on credentialing standards. However, the goals of providing concrete ideas about family involvement preparation to other teacher educators, provoking discussion and reflection, and inspiring them to try their own curricular improvements have not been fully realized. The AB1264 Task Force clearly had this next step in mind when it recommended that these case studies be distributed to all institutions of higher education engaged in the preparation of teachers and other educators. This document, then, represents not simply the end of a project but also another beginning. More exchanges of ideas and concrete efforts by other teacher educators and practitioners will be needed to develop programs that will produce a teaching force both disposed toward and able to create effective partnerships with families and communities. Readers are invited to join hands with the contributors to this volume and add their unique perspectives, talents, experience, and voices to this effort to prepare teachers to make meaningful home-school connections.

## References

- California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and the California Department of Education. (1997, January). *California standards for the teaching profession*. Sacramento, CA: Author.
- California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (1996, June). *Preparing educators for partnerships with families: Report of the advisory task force on educator preparation for parent involvement*. Sacramento, CA: Author.
- Epstein, J. L. (1991). Effects on student achievement of teachers' practices of parental involvement. In S. Silvern (Ed.), *Advances in reading/language research* (Vol. 5). (pp. 261–276). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Epstein, J. L., & Dauber, S. (1991). School programs and teacher practices of parent involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. *Elementary School Journal*, 91, 289–303.
- Epstein, J. L., & Scott-Jones, D. (1988). School-family-community connections for accelerating student progress in the elementary and middle grades. In H. M. Levin (Ed.), *Accelerated schools for at-risk students*. New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Policy Research in Education.
- Leler, H. (1983). Parent education and involvement in relation to the schools and to parents of school-aged children. In R. Haskins & D. Adams (Eds.), *Parent education and public policy*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Shartrand, A. M., Weiss, H. B., Kreider, H. M., & Lopez, M. E. (1997). *New skills for new schools: Preparing teachers in family involvement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.
- Wood, F., & Thompson, S. (1993). Assumptions about staff development based on research and best practices. *Journal of Staff Development*, 14 (4), 52–57.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Implementation of Phase I of this project was supported by the following corporations or foundations: ARCO, Chevron, Pacific Telesis, Pacific Gas & Electric, Wells Fargo, and the Zellerbach Family Fund. Five campuses of the University of California also supplied grants or in-kind support. Support for Phase 2, involving dissemination and the publication of this document came from the ARCO Corporation, the California Department of Education, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, the Intersegmental Coordinating Committee, and the University of California, Berkeley, Graduate School of Education.



# Preparing Constructivist Teachers for Parent Involvement: The Developmental Teacher Education Program

Paul Ammon and Della Peretti  
University of California, Berkeley

**The constructivist view of children as active learners invites all of us to think of a learning environment that extends well beyond the classroom—an environment in which parents and other family members can play a key role.**

**E**FFORTS TO PREPARE teachers to involve parents effectively would normally be expected to reflect the nature of the teacher education programs in which those efforts are made. In the Developmental Teacher Education (DTE) Program at the University of California, Berkeley, the shaping of our work on parent involvement by the nature of the program is essentially a self-imposed requirement. The program was conceived in the late seventies as an experiment in using developmental psychology systematically as a basis for teaching and teacher education—particularly developmental psychology in the constructivist



### About the Authors

**Paul Ammon** is Professor of Education at UC Berkeley. He helped found and has directed the Developmental Teacher Education Program since its inception in 1980. His background is in developmental psychology, and his interests include research on teacher development and studies of intellectual development. He has served as President of the Association for Constructivist Teaching.

**Della Peretti** is Academic Coordinator for the Developmental Teacher Education Program at UC Berkeley. She previously worked in the Oakland Unified School District, where she taught in grades K-8 and held a variety of school- and district-level support positions. She has a master's degree in early childhood education and a doctorate in policy and administration.

tradition of Jean Piaget (Ammon, 1984; Black, 1989; Black & Ammon, 1992). To be consistent with the program's goals, our approach to preparing teachers for parent involvement should reflect that general theoretical orientation.

But no teacher education program, however theory-driven, can be adequately characterized in terms of its theoretical orientation alone. The DTE Program is defined by other important features as well, including the student teachers it serves, the students *they* will serve in their own classrooms, and the program design and setting within which DTE operates. All of these features, together with DTE's theoretical orientation, have influenced our thinking and our activities in preparing teachers for parent involvement.

Our purpose here is to share some of the thinking we have done and some of the activities we have engaged in. We hasten to acknowledge, however, that our thoughts and actions related to parent involvement are still evolving and always will. Our thoughts having been clarified in the process of writing this chapter, we will now look for new ways to act on them. In some respects our past activities regarding parent involvement have grown out of opportunities that happened to present themselves, and it is time for us to give them further consideration. We invite our readers to join us in reflecting and acting on ideas about preparing teachers for parent involvement through a discussion based on the experiences we have had in the Developmental Teacher Education Program at Berkeley.

## A Constructivist Developmental Perspective

The constructivist developmental perspective underlying our program at Berkeley is defined by the principles that (1) knowledge is constructed by the learner through self-regulated interactions with the physical and social world; and (2) the process of knowledge construction is gradual, moving by stages through



levels of understanding that are qualitatively different and increasingly powerful. From this perspective better understandings are a central goal of intellectual development, and action and reflection are the means by which they are attained.

### **Implications for Teaching**

The principles that knowledge construction is active and gradual have important implications for teaching. They suggest that the teacher's role is not simply to serve as a source of knowledge that must be transmitted to the learner by showing and telling. Nor is the purpose to ensure that the learner will always get things right (from an adult or "expert" point of view) by prescribing lots of practice, correcting errors, and praising right answers. Rather, the teacher's main role is to help learners construct their own understandings—understandings that are better than before but perhaps not yet as good as they eventually will be.

Teachers help students construct knowledge by providing opportunities for them to solve problems of interest to the students. Showing and telling, practice, correction, and praise still have a place—mainly to support and guide action and reflection that will enable students to come up with their own ideas and procedures. These purposes are also served when teachers provide opportunities for students to interact and collaborate with others. From the students' point of view, the ideas and procedures they construct are motivated primarily by a variety of immediate goals that matter to them in their everyday lives (for example, communicating with others, gaining access to valued resources, and making sense of things). From the teacher's point of view, students' constructions are also seen as stepping stones to more advanced constructions in the future and as vehicles for the development of intelligence through the exercise of the mind. Because students construct their understandings gradually, at different rates and in different ways, teachers should introduce the same concepts in a variety of contexts and at different times. That is, instruction should be integrated, recursive, and sensitive to individual differences.

**The teacher's main role is to help learners construct their own understandings.**

**We are concerned not only with home-based parent involvement but also with community-based activities.**

### **Implications for Parent Involvement**

The constructivist developmental perspective has some related implications for parent involvement. It highlights roles for parents that may be different from or less salient than the roles suggested by other perspectives on teaching. We wish to focus here particularly on roles that parents can play *as parents* and not just as PTA members or classroom aides. As valuable as those forms of parent involvement may be, they are accessible only to a relatively small number of parents, especially in communities where many parents work or care for young children while school activities are under way. We are especially concerned, then, with roles that enable parents to contribute to their own children's learning within the context of family life. We must hasten to emphasize, however, that the home is not the only site where family life goes on and that the community in which a family spends its time can include such settings as parks, libraries, recreation centers, and schools. We are concerned not only with home-based parent involvement but also with community-based activities, including school activities that go beyond the traditional back-to-school nights and open houses—activities such as family literacy, family math, or family ESL at the school site.

Sometimes, the main role educators expect parents to play at home seems to be that of socializing their children (i.e., making sure that they are cooperative and motivated in school) so that teachers can get on with the business of teaching school subjects. The problem with this division of labor should be obvious. It assumes that academic learning normally happens in school and social learning happens at home. From a constructivist perspective both kinds of learning are active and ongoing in a variety of contexts. For example, recent research on emergent literacy has underscored the ways in which young children begin to learn about the forms and functions of written language before they begin formal schooling in reading and writing (e.g., Goelman, Oberg, & Smith, 1984). And it has been noted also that schools influence the learning of social values either by design (e.g., through values clarifica-

tion or moral education) or by default (through a kind of hidden curriculum in the everyday operation of the school).

Another common view of parents related to learning at school is that they should simply mirror the teacher's role at home—for example, by seeing to it that children do assigned work or by providing tutoring as needed. Surely, these activities are among those that parents might appropriately pursue with their children. But an exclusive emphasis on such teacher-like roles for parents fails to consider the potentially important differences between parents and teachers as individuals and between homes and classrooms as environments for learning.

Rather than think of parents as socializers or stand-ins for teachers, we should think of parents and teachers together as partners who collaborate in helping children construct social and academic knowledge. Parents and teachers may bring very different kinds of expertise to their collaborations—all the more reason for them to *collaborate* and not simply to work in isolation from or in opposition to one another. Collaboration implies not only a common goal but also communication about how best to work toward that goal. For parents and teachers the common goal is clear—to provide for the child's present and future well-being.<sup>1</sup> As to how best to pursue that goal, there clearly are potential obstacles that must be considered as we prepare teachers in the DTE Program. The nature of the obstacles will become apparent if we compare the backgrounds of our student teachers and of the parents whose children they will teach.

**Collaboration implies not only a common goal but also communication about how best to work toward that goal.**

## **Student Teachers and Children's Parents**

Students who enter the DTE Program are like most other student teachers in that they typically do not have children of their own. Obviously, this characteristic distinguishes most student teachers from the parents of the children being taught. Thus, during their preservice preparation, most student teachers can only imagine what it is like to be a parent. The few who are parents themselves can help their peers see children and family life from a

**If our graduates are to work effectively with all sorts of children and families, they have much to learn about the communities in which they will teach.**

parent's point of view. But the very nature of parenthood makes this sort of role taking quite a challenge, especially for student teachers who are still in the process of achieving identities separate from those of their parents and still see themselves primarily as offspring in their own families.

Moreover, the challenges our student teachers face in understanding the lives of parents often extend far beyond their lack of personal experience in parenting. Although we have had some success in recruiting student teachers who represent as much of the social spectrum in California as possible, a disproportionate number of DTE students are still white, middle class, or both. In contrast, recent demographic trends in California have made it a "minority majority" state in which one of every four or five schoolchildren lives below the poverty line. It is not at all unusual to find schools in which a large proportion of the children experience diverse languages and cultures at home or receive free lunch at school because of their families' economic circumstances.

Many DTE students enter the program with a strong commitment to teach in schools serving poor and minority students. They seek employment there upon graduation, believing that they can serve such children well by pursuing a developmental approach. They should realize, however, that although the basic constructivist developmental principles are taken to be universal, exactly how the principles operate may vary considerably among individuals and across cultures. Thus, learning activities and related interactions that seem appropriate from the teacher's perspective may seem problematic or even offensive to certain students and their families. And the teacher may be unaware of or even biased against alternatives that students and families would find much more appropriate.

If our graduates are to work effectively with all sorts of children and families, they have much to learn about the communities in which they will teach. Teachers from all cultural groups discover that the expectations they have formed from personal experience in their own communities do not apply to many of the students with whom they work, even if they share a common cultural

heritage. We cannot prepare student teachers at the preservice level for all the cultures, languages, and socioeconomic circumstances of the children they might teach. However, in the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, it is possible for student teachers to experience a good sample of that diversity and to learn how to learn what they will need to know as teachers in a given community.

We are optimistic about meeting the challenges described previously, especially when we consider what our students bring to the task. Along with the kind of commitment already noted, they also bring inspiring levels of competence and creativity. In the remainder of this chapter, we will share some examples of the work our students have done in preparing for effective collaborations with parents. First, however, we will provide an overview of the DTE Program and the activities related to parent involvement within it.

## **Preparation for Parent Involvement Within the DTE Framework**

During the two years in which students are in the DTE Program, they satisfy requirements for both the Multiple Subject Credential and the M.A. degree in Education.<sup>2</sup> They do so by simultaneously undertaking a sequence of course work and a series of five student teaching placements that, together, span all four of the semesters in which they are enrolled. Our students also collect and analyze field data for a master's research project that relates the study of development to teaching.

### **Program Structure and Curriculum: An Overview**

The basic structure of the DTE Program allows for a curriculum that, in keeping with the developmental perspective on teaching and learning, is integrated, recursive, and sensitive to individual differences. That is, it allows students to confront and think about the same fundamental issues regarding development and teaching in a variety of contexts and at different levels of understanding during their progress through the program. The integration of course work with student teaching, for example, is pro-

**Preparation for parent involvement is being approached in [an] integrated, recursive, and individualized fashion.**

moted not only by the fact that students are engaged in both at all times but also by the efforts of master teachers (including many program graduates) and supervisors who are well acquainted with professional practice and with the program's philosophy. The curriculum's recursiveness is illustrated by the presence of course work dealing with each of the basic school subjects in both the first and second years. Sensitivity to individual differences is seen in the frequent choices students are given as to how they will carry out assignments and satisfy program requirements.

Preparation for parent involvement is being approached in the same sort of integrated, recursive, and individualized fashion. It is considered, for example, in the first-year course on the teaching of mathematics, during which time is devoted to Family Math activities that have been developed at Berkeley's Lawrence Hall of Science; and it is a topic in the second-year seminar on development and literacy.

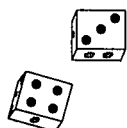
Likewise, there is systematic study of the communities surrounding the schools in which student teachers are placed in both the first and last semesters. In their last semester, for example, groups of students placed at Oakland's Garfield Elementary School have carried out and reported on field assignments that give them experience with various aspects of life in the highly diverse, multicultural community that Garfield serves (Peretti, 1992, forthcoming). These experiences are generally quite enlightening, as in the case of a student teacher who discovered how difficult it is to get information from the Immigration and Naturalization Service, even for someone who is a native speaker of English.

Other activities relating to parent involvement along the way include participation by student teachers in conferences with parents; the designing of parent-oriented lesson plans; and the writing of newsletters in which student teachers tell parents about their work in the classroom, suggest ways in which parents might get involved, and seek suggestions. Along with these generic activities are opportunities for parent involvement projects that are more individualized, as illustrated in the following discussion.

## Bringing Home and School Together:

### Community Study and Innovative Curriculum Design

If learning is ongoing across varied contexts, teachers should seek continuities between home and school so that learning in both contexts will be mutually supportive. The continuities can be problematic when the culture and language of the child's home are quite far removed from teaching practices and learning activities with which the teacher is familiar. Under those circumstances teachers must seek to bring home and school together by learning about children's lives outside of school and adapting the curriculum accordingly. Parents can collaborate in this effort by serving as interpreters and as consultants to teachers on the nature of life in their homes and communities and by supporting their children's participation in culturally appropriate family learning activities directly related to the school's curriculum. The following examples of projects carried out by DTE students illustrate how such an approach to parent involvement might be pursued.



	20
	19
	18
	17
	16
	15
	14
	13
	12
	11
	10
	9
	8
	7
o	6
o o	5
o o o	4
o o o o	3
o o o o o	2
o o o o o o	1

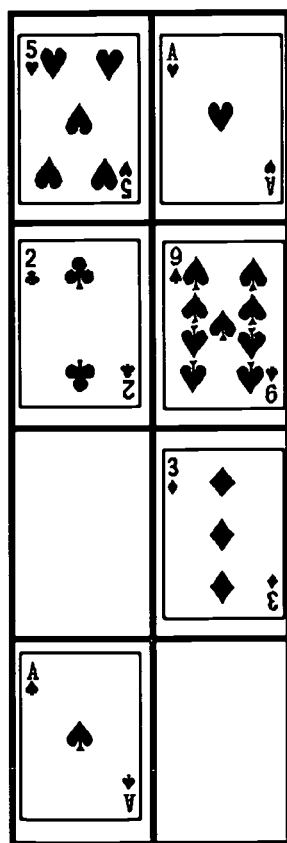
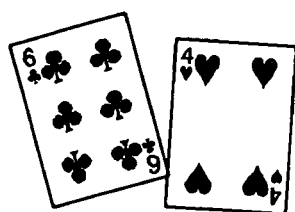


*Designing culturally appropriate math games for school and home.* A master's research study by David Frankel grew out of his experience as a student teacher at Garfield Elementary School. He was working in a first grade classroom with the children of Mien refugees from Southeast Asia. In attempting to be both a developmental teacher and a culturally sensitive one, he wanted not only to base his mathematics instruction on activities that involved manipulatives but also to use manipulatives that would be culturally appropriate for the Mien children. From his contacts with adults in the community and with the children themselves, he learned that two popular activities among the Mien are fishing and playing games with cards and dice. He then proceeded to develop math games related to those activities.

In one of the games, children took turns rolling pairs of dice to determine how many beans each could put down on a paper game board with spaces numbered from 1 to 20. The first player to fill all 20 spaces was the winner of that round. This game gave children opportunities to add the numbers on the two dice (and on the



board) and to note that certain sums might be attained in different ways with the dice (e.g.,  $7 = 6+1$  or  $5+2$  or  $4+3$ ). The game even provided background for later instruction in graphing and probability because the different sums that can be attained with two dice are not all equally probable. Other games involved drawing pairs of face-up playing cards, or numbered fish from a paper fish pond, to make a specified sum. Here the emphasis was on coordinating addition with its inverse operation, subtraction, to determine what missing addend was needed together with 6, for example, in order to make 10.



David Frankel's culturally appropriate math games allowed the Mien children to build on their home experience, motivating their engagement and helping them learn how to play the games quickly despite their still very limited proficiency in English. David also found evidence that the games enabled the children to demonstrate knowledge about number that was not apparent when they carried out traditional paper-and-pencil assignments in mathematics. Moreover (and most important for the present discussion), although David's study was concerned with use of the games in the classroom, they could easily be played at home as well. The materials needed would already be available at home (i.e., cards, dice, and beans) or could be sent home from school (i.e., fish, fish ponds, and game boards made of paper). Parents could be encouraged to have their children teach the games to them and to other family members and could also come into the classroom to direct such activities in the children's home language.

David's interest in making the home-school connection through culturally appropriate instruction did not just appear out of nowhere. It had been encouraged and guided by several other components of the DTE Program. For example, David and his classmates had taken courses that focused particularly on cultural variation (e.g., courses in urban education and in teaching linguistic and cultural minority students); they had worked with Family Math; they had participated in special workshops on parent involvement and on culturally appropriate instruction in their student



**What David had learned, then, was not a specific curriculum but a process for designing curricula that would connect with children's families and with their lives outside school.**

teaching seminar; and they had engaged in other related activities mentioned in the previous section. More immediately, David's project grew directly out of the supervision he received as he and several DTE classmates undertook a study of the school and community at Garfield.

David's master's project was, therefore, the culmination of much that he had done while a student in DTE. Moreover, it was also a foundation for what he would do in his own classroom after graduating. As a first-year teacher David taught a very diverse group of children whose common culture derived from the fact that their parents worked at a U.S. Air Force base. Encouraged by his previous work, he began to develop a curriculum that revolved around airplanes, runways, and so forth, and engaged the participation of parents who had special expertise related to aviation. What David had learned, then, was not a specific curriculum but a process for designing curricula that would connect with children's families and with their lives outside school.

*Writing about parent involvement in children's literacy.* Each year the entire cohort of second-year students in DTE is asked, in a final-semester seminar on development and literacy, to carry out a group project in which the goal is to produce a document that describes and explains what would be entailed in a distinctly developmental approach to literacy instruction for children in kindergarten through grade six. The students are given a considerable amount of latitude in deciding what their document will include, how its parts will be organized, and who will write each part. Typically, the final product consists of several chapters, each of which is devoted to a major topic in developmental literacy instruction. Although each chapter is authored primarily by one or two students, other members of the class contribute significantly by reading drafts and participating in general discussions about the entire document as it takes shape during the semester.

In the past three years, each cohort of students carrying out this project has included a chapter on parents, whereas previous classes did not. This fact alone seems to reflect the influence of the

**Parents are much more likely to be reassured by evidence that children do indeed learn from such programs—as opposed to a teacher who simply says, “Trust me, I know what I’m doing.”**

increased attention we began giving to parent involvement in 1990-91, partly in response to the work of the Joint Subcommittee on Parent Involvement. Especially interesting is an apparent progression from 1991 to 1993, such that each succeeding chapter on parent involvement treats the subject in a deeper and more comprehensive way.

The initial chapter on parents (1991) focused almost entirely on the goal of reassuring parents that a developmentally based whole-language approach to literacy instruction would be good for their children. Although this focus does address the reality that some parents are inclined to have doubts about such practices as invented spelling in writing or an emphasis on meaning in reading, it also treats parents mainly as potential adversaries who must be placated so that teachers can teach as they see fit. Still, this effort draws attention to the importance of teachers communicating with parents about their instructional programs. Moreover, parents are more likely to be reassured by evidence that children do indeed learn from such programs—as opposed to a teacher who simply says, “Trust me; I know what I’m doing.” Therefore, teachers are encouraged to document student progress in ways they should, anyway, for their own purposes (e.g., through writing portfolios, which the student teachers discussed briefly in this 1991 chapter). Finally, the same chapter concludes with some suggestions about what parents can do to support their children’s development in reading and writing. However, there is a mainstream, middle-class bias in these suggestions (e.g., a recommendation that parents play scrabble or do crossword puzzles with their children). Thus, while the 1991 chapter on parent involvement represents progress in comparison with the reports of previous years, relations with parents need to be approached in a more positive and comprehensive way.

The students’ 1992 chapter on parents does take an approach that is more positive and more comprehensive. It begins by emphasizing the importance of a child’s life outside the classroom, especially in the context of the family, and it points to the need for

the school to work in harmony with family and community. It also considers variation among parents and families as to the kinds of formal educational resources they have to draw on and the ways in which they spend time with their children. For this variation to be taken into account, the chapter argues that a variety of means must be used to promote communication between home and school and involve parents in their children's learning of school subjects. The articulation of these general principles is certainly encouraging. However, the principles are not well illustrated by concrete examples of practice; nor are they well connected to principles of development as they apply to the domain of literacy.

In contrast, the 1993 chapter, written by Tina Huie, goes a good deal further in providing the kinds of practical illustrations and connections to developmental theory that were largely lacking in its predecessors. More attention is paid to ways in which teachers might make adjustments in suggested home literacy activities according to a family's particular circumstances—whether, for example, the parents are literate and can afford to buy printed material. The introduction to the chapter explicitly places the topic of home-school collaborations regarding literacy in the context of a more general view of language development as seen from a constructivist perspective. And a number of the specific home literacy activities subsequently discussed have a distinctly constructivist flavor, such as the construction of “scatter poems” by cutting and pasting words from newspapers and other printed matter. Tina also attends to the selection and modification of such activities for children at different developmental levels and to their connections with other parts of the curriculum. In general, then, this chapter treats the topic of family involvement in a fashion that shows relatively high levels of differentiation and integration.

Although each of these chapters was authored principally by one student teacher, we believe they reflect more broadly on the level of sophistication that each succeeding cohort of DTE students attained as to the topic of parent involvement. In each case the author shared drafts of the chapter with other members of the class

**We believe [these student-authored chapters] reflect more broadly on the level of sophistication that each succeeding cohort of DTE students attained as to the topic of parent involvement.**

and received feedback that was incorporated into the final version, which therefore represented a group consensus. Moreover, each succeeding cohort had gone through a program that was increasing both the quantity and the quality of its attention to parent involvement in the three semesters that led up to the one in which the chapter was written. All students were now spending their final semester in a placement that focused on school and community. Finally, each succeeding cohort read the work of its predecessors and could build on what had been accomplished in previous years.

### **Parent Involvement and Teacher Development**

The progression in chapters about parent involvement from one DTE cohort to the next may resemble the kind of developmental sequence that students go through individually as their thinking about parent involvement evolves over time. We have documented a general sequence that DTE students seem to go through in their preservice and early in-service years as to their thinking about child behavior, development, learning, and teaching (Ammon & Hutcheson, 1989; Ammon & Levin, 1993; Black & Ammon, 1992). In this sequence thinking about pedagogy moves from predominantly empiricist and behaviorist orientations to more constructivist notions that are at first quite global and then become increasingly differentiated and integrated. We would expect that an individual's thinking about parent involvement would develop through a related sequence. How thinking about parent involvement develops and how its development interacts with other aspects of teaching are questions for future research. Answers would help us improve our current efforts to prepare teachers for parent involvement and for teaching in general.

## **Good Practice in Preparing Teachers for Parent Involvement**

The chapters our students have written on parent involvement and literacy development, together with other examples such as David Frankel's work as a first-year teacher, lead us to believe that we have, in fact, made progress in preparing teachers for parent

involvement. However, it is difficult to attribute these outcomes to particular activities that our students have engaged in while enrolled in the DTE Program. As we have indicated, a fairly large variety of activities relevant to parent involvement can be cited. Indeed, multiple perspectives on parent involvement are more or less required by an approach to instruction that is integrated, recursive, and sensitive to individual differences. The extent to which a given activity contributes to a teacher's preparation for parent involvement undoubtedly varies from one individual to another. Certainly, some parent involvement activities of the sort we have tried in DTE may be more productive than others. But we are not yet able to offer definitive conclusions as to what those more productive activities are. We can, however, offer some thoughts about the conditions that make a parent involvement activity productive on the basis of our experience to date and in the light of general principles of effective instruction from a developmental point of view.

### **Individualization**

A notable feature of the two examples discussed is that they were both more self-selected than assigned and therefore more individualized than generic. That is, not all DTE students are required to carry out master's projects on culturally appropriate instruction in mathematics (or on any other topic related to parent involvement). Nor do all DTE students write chapters on parent involvement for the group project on developmental instruction in literacy. Rather, the students who engage in such activities choose to do so, and their classmates choose other worthwhile topics for their own master's projects and for their chapters on developmental literacy. The ownership that results from this sort of self-selection seems to foster greater effort on the part of student teachers than more generic assignments, which sometimes are carried out at a lower level of engagement. The implication for a teacher education program, then, may be to offer students an open-ended menu of alternative ways to get into the topic of parent

**The ownership  
that results from . . .  
self-selection seems  
to foster greater effort  
on the part of student  
teachers than more  
generic assignments.**

involvement. The availability of various options seems likely to benefit not only the individual student but also the group as a whole—for reasons to be discussed further.

Not all individualized activities need be initiated by the student, however. Others may grow out of unique opportunities that a student is encouraged to take advantage of. At the beginning of her major solo placement, a DTE student, Dena Peterson, was encouraged by her master teacher to telephone the parents of each child in her classroom. In some situations this approach to communicating with parents would be either undesirable or not feasible; but in this case the master teacher (DTE graduate Jill Coskey) knew it would be useful to all concerned. At first Dena was quite reluctant to carry out the assignment; but in retrospect she felt that she had learned a lot from planning what to say in her conversations with parents and from gathering information about their children. The calls to parents also helped to establish Dena's credibility prior to her weeks of solo teaching and set the stage for her to request parental support during the solo period.

**Even regular assignments can be approached in a more individualized fashion.**

Even regular assignments can be approached in a more individualized fashion, as illustrated in Table 1, which contains a menu of options our first-year students were given recently for writing about family involvement in their weekly journals. These options offer students an opportunity to address the topic of family involvement in some personally relevant way and suggest possibilities that students might pursue further in the future. For example, the first option, asking students to "investigate how children and families [in their current placements] relate during nonschool hours," was inspired in part by David Frankel's work on culturally appropriate math games and might lead other students into projects similar to David's.

### **Reflection Through Writing and Discussion**

Along with their individualized nature, the activities we have described engaged student teachers in a great deal of reflection on issues of parent involvement. The reflection was supported by



**Table 1.**  
**MENU OF OPTIONS FOR JOURNAL WRITING ON FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**  
**(Developmental Teacher Education Program, Spring, 1994)**

This year we are trying a menu approach to some of your journal assignments. The objective this month is for you to become familiar with the role families play in your classroom and in your school. We use the word *family* instead of *parent* because it is increasingly common to find children being raised by adults other than their parents. You may select the journal assignment most appropriate to your situation and your learning style.

**Option 1**

Investigate how children and families relate during nonschool hours. You can interview, take a poll, design a questionnaire, conduct a series of lessons which require your students to do the actual research, or use any format you like (with approval of your teacher and principal). What activities do families participate in together? What do children do after school? On weekends? During vacations, including summer? How can you use what you learned to plan curriculum which incorporates interests of families? How can you draw families into the instructional process?

**Option 2**

With the consent of your teacher, read the registration form, health forms, and home-language survey forms of all the children in your class. Prepare a chart or graph of your findings regarding the families of your students. What implications can you draw from your data about communication you will have with families? Are there certain stereotypes that come into play for you? How can you overcome the inclination to judge families invidiously because of their occupation or home language? Will you be the kind of teacher who reads every cumulative folder before meeting the children? Or will you get to know the children first and then look up their vital statistics? Or will you ignore the folders completely? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach?

**Option 3**

Option 3 is the same as option 2 except that the perspective of social class structure is emphasized. Instead of a graph, make a collage or other visual representation of your perception of society's expectations for this group of children in the U.S. as based on the occupations and home languages of their parents. As early as elementary school, some children have a sense of entitlement; others have a sense of futility. How can you contribute to an enhanced sense of equity and social justice for the families of children in this school? How might this approach differ from prior placements?

**Option 4**

Interview at least three of the following: a parent, an administrator, a classified staff person, a teacher, or a student about the role of families in the school. How well do the results of the interviews match what you have observed? In writing up the results of the interviews, be sure to include your own philosophy of family involvement in your concluding remarks.

**Option 5**

Devise a plan for communicating with hard-to-reach families in your class. These may be people who are always out of town, who have no phone, who are not literate, who have physical limitations, who do not speak English, or who are hostile toward or intimidated by schools. Is it important to reach all of these people? Or is it more important to respect their desire to be separate from their children's school experience? How do you perceive your role in family relations?

**Option 6**

Together with Della and your supervisor, create a customized assignment that furthers your understanding of the role of families in the school. Give Della a copy of your self-assignment for possible inclusion in this menu in future semesters.

**Discussions and exchanges of writing with peers seem especially important.**

peers. Opportunities for spoken and written dialogue are plentiful in DTE. Each week, for example, when our student teachers write about their field experiences in their journals, they receive written feedback from their campus-based supervisors and classmates. They also meet frequently in small “supe groups,” with their respective supervisors, to discuss student teaching. Discussions and exchanges of writing with peers seem especially important because they enable everyone in the group to confront issues regarding all aspects of teaching, including parent involvement, in a variety of contexts and from various points of view. Thus, each student can think about and profit from the experience and insights of several other students.

A final example illustrates not only the value of reflection stimulated by writing but also the kind of learning that can come from a serendipitous event in the experience of an individual student teacher. Table 2 presents an excerpt from the journal of second-year student Tommy Ortega, who discusses an incident in which he successfully recruited the aid of a “cool mom” in his work with bilingual kindergartners. Tommy’s writing reveals that he had begun reflecting on this incident before he turned to his journal (“I didn’t really think much of it at the time, but after[ward] I was kind of proud. . . .”) and that he had already discussed the incident with his master teacher, Carmen. But the reflections go further as Tommy writes (“Now that I think about the whole situation, I realize . . .”). And all this reflecting leads him to some important insights (i.e., that his newfound comfort in working with parents derives from the comfort he has achieved in his own teaching and that “if a parent who is learning to read and write can help, then just about all parents can”).

At the same time, however, Tommy expresses some apprehensions about a certain kind of parent who “would be absolute hell to have helping in the classroom.”<sup>3</sup> While there may be an element of realism in this remark, it also reminds us that development toward effective parent involvement takes more time and experience than Tommy had when he wrote his “cool mom” story. But even



Tommy's experience with this one incident did not end with the writing of the story because the story was written for another student teacher to read and respond to, so there was yet another opportunity for discussion and reflection based on the same event.

**Table 2.**

**EXCERPT FROM THE JOURNAL OF A SECOND-YEAR STUDENT TEACHER**

Today in my kindergarten class, while I was setting up for stations, I had the chance to ask a parent to help with one of the stations. This may not seem like that big of a deal to some, and I didn't really think much of it at the time, but after[ward] I was kind of proud to have effectively, kindly, and professionally used my authority to ask a mom to help with a station. I guess what I'm getting at is that I feel like I made a bit of a breakthrough in terms of my development as a teacher. This particular mom is really nice (in Spanish *nice* isn't such a bland word) and very enthusiastic when it comes to school. I explained how she was going to help the children trace their names. First she would ask a group the color of their table, then have them recognize their names, then hand out the paper, etc. Now that I think about the whole situation, I realize the reason I felt so comfortable explaining the procedure was that I knew the lesson well, and I am beginning to feel relatively comfortable as a teacher in the classroom. Hmmm . . .

Another thing that is really interesting and inspiring for all parents who feel apprehensive about helping in the classroom is that this mom is coming to our classroom in the mornings (our class meets in the afternoon) to learn to read and write. Yes, she is illiterate, but learning quickly. Carmen, my master teacher, said that the mom was actually trying to write down the names of all the kids so she could learn how each name is spelled. Carmen also said the mom was super excited and proud during and after the whole thing. This is also an eye opener in terms of using parents effectively in the classroom, because if a parent who is learning to read and write can help, then just about all parents can. Then again perhaps she is/was such a great helper because she doesn't think she knows all the answers to properly educating children. Because there are also those moms and dads who, because "they know exactly what kids need these days," would be absolute hell to have helping in the class.

So what is the point of sharing this activity? I guess I'm sharing my enthusiasm about taking the opportunity to increase my role as a teacher and also sharing an inspiring story about a cool mom.

## Conclusion

Our purpose in this chapter is to share with other teacher educators some ideas and examples regarding teacher preparation for parent involvement—ideas that reflect the constructivist developmental perspective on which the Developmental Teacher Education Program at Berkeley was founded. The constructivist view of children as active learners invites all of us to think of a learning environment that extends well beyond the classroom—an environment in which parents and other family members can play a key role just as they do more generally in children's lives. The constructivist view of *teachers* as active learners, together with our experience to date, leads us to conclude that the sharing of ideas and examples relating to parent involvement is an essential activity not only *between* teacher education programs—as in the conferences that preceded this volume—but *within* programs as well. That is, new teachers seem most likely to become effective in working with parents if their preparation includes a wide variety of opportunities to consider possible ways of doing so. They also need multiple opportunities to act on the possibilities that seem most appropriate in their student teaching placements and to share their experiences and reflections with others. With this sort of approach, emphasis is shifted from learning about parent involvement to constructing or inventing it. And with invention comes understanding (Piaget, 1973).

## References

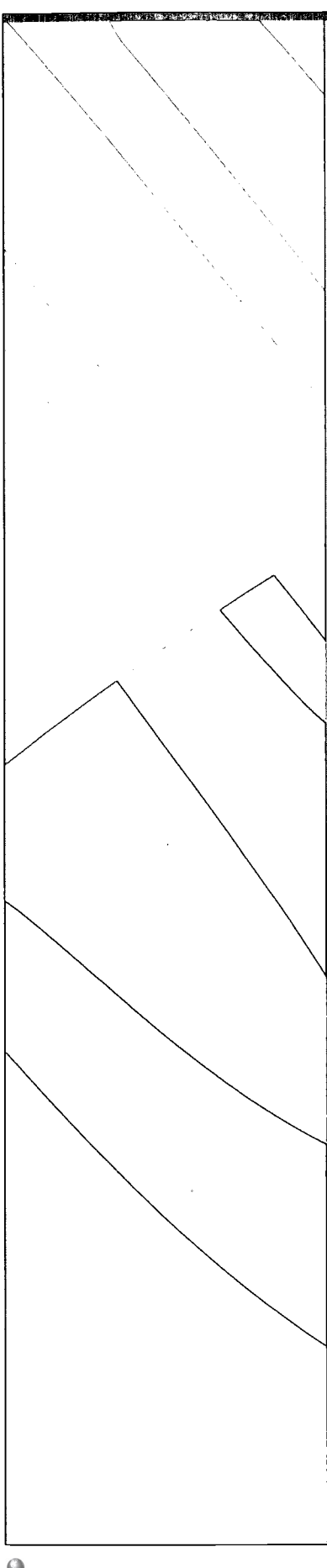
- Ammon, P. (1984). Human development, teaching, and teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 11 (4), 95–108.
- Ammon, P., & Hutcheson, B. P. (1989). Promoting the development of teachers' pedagogical conceptions. *Genetic Epistemologist*, 17 (4), 23–29.
- Ammon, P., & Levin, B. B. (1993). Expertise in teaching from a developmental perspective. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 5 (4), 319–326.
- Black, A. (Ed.). (1989). Developmental teacher education. *Genetic Epistemologist*, 17 (4).
- Black, A., & Ammon, P. (1992). A developmental-constructivist approach to teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 43 (5), 323–335.
- Goelman, H., Oberg, A., & Smith F. (Eds.). (1984). *Awakening to literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Levin, B. B., & Ammon, P. (1992). Toward an understanding of teacher development: A longitudinal case study of four teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 19 (4), 19–37.
- Peretti, D. (1992). Student teaching in a multilingual multicultural setting. *The Educator*, 6 (1), 20–25. [Graduate School of Education, University of California at Berkeley]
- Peretti, D. (Forthcoming). Redesigning field experiences: From exposure to engagement. In J. King (Ed.), *Meeting the challenge of cultural diversity in teacher education*.
- Piaget, J. (1973). *To understand is to invent*. New York: Viking.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>We do not mean to suggest that we are unaware of the all too frequent instances in which parents or teachers are abusive toward children. However, our discussion here is about the preparation of caring teachers to work with that great majority of parents who have their children's best interests at heart— notwithstanding the possibility that even those parents and teachers may sometimes have other goals that come into conflict with their concerns for children.

<sup>2</sup>We are working toward approval of DTE as a program that offers students the new Cross-cultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD) authorization in keeping with our commitment to prepare teachers for the full diversity of children in California's schools.

<sup>3</sup>For more on student teachers' apprehensions about parents, see the chapter by Peg Hartmann Winkelman.



# Preparing Teachers to Serve Children and Families with Diverse Backgrounds

**Marianne D'Emidio-Caston**

University of California, Santa Barbara

**The 1990s' struggle is for America's conscience and future—a future that is being determined right now in the bodies and minds and spirits of every American child—white, African American, Latino, Asian American, Native American, rich, middle class, and poor (Edelman, 1992, p. 81).**

**M**ARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN's words eloquently present the challenge of our times. Increasingly, teacher educators are being reminded of their responsibility in preparing the next generation of teachers to serve children and families with diverse backgrounds. Educating university students in California to be effective cross-cultural teachers is clearly a moral imperative, considering the degree of diversity in family background and structure characterizing the state's population. For example, over half the children in the state are now identified

#### About the Author

**Marianne D'Emidio-Caston**, Ph.D., is a lecturer, coordinator, and supervisor for the Multiple Subject Teaching Credential Program at UC Santa Barbara. She also has a master's degree in educational policy and administration and served as Acting Director of the Administrative Services Credential Program. In 1995 she received a Distinguished Research in Education Award from the Association of Teacher Educators for her work in understanding the development of teacher thinking in beginning teachers.

**I have come to appreciate . . . ways in which dialogues centered on personal experiences can be useful in helping student teachers bridge home and school cultures.**

as Latino, Asian, or African American; over 100,000 children enter public school each year speaking little or no English; and more than 1.7 million children live in single-parent homes (*Children Now*, 1993; Guthrie et al., 1992; *Kids Count Data Book*, 1995).

Today, teacher education is struggling to support the development of the critical knowledge, skills, and attitudes educators need to be able to communicate with children and families across the boundaries of diversity. Teachers need to see that such communication can best be realized in the context of a partnership between home and school.

This chapter describes a rationale and strategies developed by the Multiple Subject Teacher Education Program at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), to prepare teachers to serve children and families with diverse backgrounds. I will relate our growing awareness of the link between student teachers' appreciation of difference and their readiness to implement successful partnerships with families.

By summarizing program activities that have generated successful learning experiences and shaped student teachers' understandings, I hope to provide a perspective on ways we might better help teachers support families in a changing world. I will also share examples of naturally occurring incidents that seemed to be authentic attempts by student teachers to bridge different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In writing this account, I have come to appreciate more fully the ways in which dialogues centered on personal experiences can be useful in helping student teachers bridge home and school cultures. In describing these activities, I will draw on my collection of class notes and student journals so that the voices of my student teachers are added to my own.

My narration begins with a description of the student teachers in the Multiple Subject Credential Program at UCSB. Next, I will summarize the assumptions guiding program decisions, provide details of several organized activities, and discuss issues resulting

from program implementation. Finally, I will return to my own growing understanding of education for inclusion and the direction teacher education might take in the future at UCSB.

## **Obstacles to Awareness and Appreciation of Diversity at UCSB**

Two factors contribute to problems in educating students about diversity at UCSB. One challenge to our program is related to the background and experiences of our teacher education students; the other is related to the characteristics of the Santa Barbara community.

### **Demographic Characteristics of Student Teachers**

**One challenge to our program is related to the background and experiences of our teacher education students.**

During the past five years, students entering the UCSB Multiple Subject Credential Program have been fairly homogeneous. Most of our students are white middle-class women recently graduated from four-year baccalaureate degree programs. Fewer than 10 percent are men. Although the number of students of color is increasing, they rarely make up more than 15 percent of the student population. Until this year there have been no physically challenged or African-American student teachers in the program. Each year only a few students enter our program after spending time in the workforce or after starting families.

This demographic profile of our students contrasts sharply with California's diverse population. Yet it reflects the mostly middle-class and upper-middle-class makeup of Santa Barbara and the student population at UCSB. The prior experiences of our student teachers give them little preparation for understanding the realities experienced by a large percentage of their students. One of our prospective teachers expressed the mismatch in the following way:

I was so shocked when my kindergarten student told me that his father worked in a Burger King. I mean, that's a job for a teenager who needs some extra money to buy a car. Fathers are lawyers or businessmen or doctors. I don't know how to relate to these people.

**We have felt compelled . . . to do more to increase our students' sensitivity to working with families of children from different cultural backgrounds.**

### **Demographic Characteristics of Santa Barbara**

Located at the edge of the Pacific Ocean, Santa Barbara is one of the most picturesque tourist towns on the West Coast. Despite the overall impression of affluence communicated by its clean, well-manicured appearance and its high real estate prices, schools in the area serve a diverse population, both culturally and economically. The nearly 150,000 population of Santa Barbara and neighboring Goleta is predominantly white and Latino, with fewer numbers of African-American or Native-American families. This diversity is unequally distributed in the schools of the Santa Barbara area.

Supervised teaching of children from varied backgrounds is a program requirement at UCSB. However, in deciding on ways to facilitate student teachers' understanding of issues of diversity, we have been restricted by the nature of the community and the schools surrounding UCSB. During the past two years, we have gathered most of the UCSB student teachers into three schools that more closely represent current California demographics. We have felt compelled, however, to do more to increase our students' sensitivity to working with families of children from different cultural backgrounds. Our strategy has involved designing activities systematically and taking advantage of teachable moments as they occur during the year to increase our students' awareness of diversity.

### **Theoretical Assumptions Guiding Program Activities**

A single basic assumption underlies many of the planned program experiences designed by UCSB teacher educators. We believe that if student teachers are aware of the way their culture has shaped them, they will be more sensitive to the cultural makeup of students different from themselves. Consequently, we ask student teachers to examine the relationships between their ethical, political, and moral values and their developing pedagogical knowledge.



**Our program offers multiple opportunities for reflection and support.**

The process of knowledge construction has been described by such cognitive theorists as Piaget (1952) and Vygotsky (1978). Kagan (1992) has extended this theoretical analysis to teacher development in her recent review of studies of teacher growth. Each identifies a sequence of dissonance or disequilibrium and consequent reconstruction of new schematic relationships as central to the learning process.

Often, constructivists suggest that reorganizational processes are experienced as painful to the learner (Festinger, 1957). The discomfort occurs when prior beliefs and patterns of perception must be discarded. The familiar and comfortable become inadequate while new ways of understanding are still unclear. Because awareness of the pain and marginalization experienced by some student teachers may, in turn, generate disequilibrium in their peers, our program offers multiple opportunities for reflection and support. By supporting personal risk taking and the sharing of experiences, supervisors and instructors model community building and provide opportunities for students to develop empathy across differences.

The following story is an example of a student teacher's spontaneous response to a class activity in which she had been encouraged to share her experiences:

When I was growing up in Mexico, I was always very proud of my family. It seemed to me that everyone knew how smart my family was. All seven of us went to the same elementary school, where I, being one of the youngest, felt I had some type of special power just because I was a Saldívar kid. A good way to describe me as a kid would probably be self-confident. . . . In my school the only award that was given out to students was the Outstanding Student Award at the end of the year. I was the recipient of such award in my grade every year, and so this made me even more sure of myself.

Our arrival to the U.S. meant to me an end to the outgoing, self-assured girl that I once was. The transition was very traumatic. I was in a class where the teacher did not speak my language, and the kids saw me as the class dummy. . . . My education in the U.S. was tempered by my fear of failing. I became withdrawn from everything academic because I completely closed off school. I began the healing process from this trauma not until I got to college.

**A major objective . . .  
has been to have  
student teachers be-  
come aware of their  
own cultural heritage,  
patterns of interaction,  
and assumptions.**

The power and authenticity of this personal anecdote profoundly affected the other students, causing them to think about times they had been quick to make judgments based on behaviors similar to those described and about the ramifications of their actions. The storytelling created a type of disequilibrium that resulted in some growth in the thinking of the other student teachers.

According to analyses of affective development, awareness of alternative perspectives is the first stage in a process that can lead to internalization of new values and, sometimes, behavioral change or utilization of new learning (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964; Rosegrant & Cooper, 1986). A major objective of many of our planned activities in the UCSB program has been to have student teachers become aware of their own cultural heritage, patterns of interaction, and assumptions. The next step involves helping these prospective educators recognize how their personal perspectives provide a framework for their understanding of events. These insights lead student teachers to appreciate the diversity of perspectives among their fellow teachers and the children with whom they work. During the past few years, we have found a number of ways to increase all of these types of awareness. Although such knowledge is only a first step, it is an important prerequisite for reaching out to students and families of different cultural backgrounds.

## **Planned Program Events**

At UCSB a student can earn a basic teaching credential in a one-year, full-time postgraduate program. We plan events and activities to address the issues of language and cultural diversity within the context of content classes and professional seminars. Some activities are developed for small seminar groups; others, for the entire cohort at one time. Many activities and assignments have been presented to students in the English-as-a-second-language (ESL) class and followed up in small-group seminars during

students' field placements. The following descriptions present a collection of experiences we have used at UCSB to raise awareness of diversity and parent involvement issues. In the five years I have worked as a supervisor and lecturer in the UCSB teacher education program, some of these experiences have been used only once, some have been incorporated into the program every year, and some have been modified substantially as we tried them out and learned from our efforts with our students.

### **Intrapersonal Awareness: The Culture Cluster**

One simple but effective activity we carry out in the ESL class is the "culture cluster." In the middle of a plain piece of paper, student teachers draw a sun with rays. They write their name in the center of the sun and on each ray record a cultural influence that has contributed to their sense of identity. Such influences might include religion, ethnicity, social status, birth order, and travel. The student teachers then select one of these influences and write about how that factor has affected them as a teacher. Afterwards, the students share their thoughts. This activity supports awareness of personal perspective and the ways in which their culture has shaped them in relation to others. This particular exercise has been repeated in various classes over the years because of its simplicity and because of the deep personal awareness our student teachers appear to gain from it.

### **Cultural Assumptions: The Albatross Simulation**

An activity that has generated intense discussion about cultural assumptions is a simulation named The Albatross.<sup>1</sup> Following the Confluent Pedagogical Model (Brown, 1972, 1990), it encourages both cognitive and affective involvement by the learner. We have found that the activity also helps student teachers learn to draw distinctions between descriptive and interpretive statements about events.

In this activity students take roles and proceed to play their parts to create the experience of simulated reality. The simulation

**The facilitator pays particular attention to addressing the cultural assumptions underlying students' interpretations of events.**

is created to allow players to involve themselves fully in their assumed roles. Because different groups of student teachers vary as to personal characteristics, no two simulations are the same. However, our experience has been that the activity consistently draws students' attention to the role of cultural assumptions in the interpretation of events. The following sections provide details of the simulation:

*Role of the facilitator.* Usually, once the action begins the facilitator monitors the interactions of participants and moves the play along, stopping the action only occasionally to clarify or point out specific events. When the action stops, processing begins. In some simulations interpretive processing activities occur intermittently; but in the Albatross exercise, student "quick writes" and whole-group discussion occur only at the end of the simulation. The facilitator pays particular attention to addressing the cultural assumptions underlying students' interpretations of events.

*Preparation.* Student teachers are prepared for the experience by being told ahead of time that when they arrive for class, they will be involved in a simulation. No other details are given. A rectangular space is created in the middle of the classroom, and chairs are arranged on both of the longer sides, facing the center. A table covered with a white cloth is placed at one end of the rectangle. Several dishes of food and urns of drink are arranged on the table. Candles and incense are lit, and the lights in the room are dimmed. Another set of chairs, corresponding to the number of male students in the class, is placed in a circle opposite the banquet table. The regular classroom environment is thereby transformed, and the familiar is made strange.

*Beginning the simulation.* When students arrive, they are greeted at the door by two Albatrossian guides, one male and one female. Both guides are dressed in white flowing robes and have their heads covered. The man wears shoes; the woman does not. As they arrive, some students are guided to sit in the chairs on the long sides of the rectangle. These students are the *observers*. Male students and an equal number of female students are asked to

remain outside until the rest of the class arrives. These students are designated as *participants*. When the participants enter, they are urged to find seats in the centrally situated chairs or on the floor.

The Albatrossian guides encourage female participants to leave their chairs and kneel on the floor. If any males are on the floor, they are induced to sit in the chairs vacated by the females. This and all other communication during the simulation are conducted in a special Albatrossian language. Touching is done only in ceremonial ways, such as in the greeting. The effort to get the participants into the proper places is done principally through (1) a hiss, which indicates disapproval; (2) a hum, which indicates approval; or (3) a clicking of the tongue, which serves to attract attention or to transfer factual information. All of these initial activities, carried out with as little sound as possible, contribute to an eerie quiet punctuated only by the clicking or humming sounds of the guides. Once the participants are arranged properly in the chairs, the clicking and humming resume until all the women have removed their shoes.

The simulation continues with an official greeting of each participant. The Albatrossian man greets each male by holding him by the shoulders and waist and by rubbing his guest's right leg with his own. When all the male students have been greeted, they return to their chairs. Then the Albatrossian woman greets each female participant. She kneels in front of a standing female guest and runs both hands down her lower legs and feet in a ceremonial way. The female guest is then guided to resume a kneeling position. After the greetings a pause ensues.

The Albatrossians maintain unsmiling but serene and pleasant expressions and do not register reactions to feelings or responses voiced by any participants. Students who giggle, talk, or otherwise disturb the ritual are hissed at—but not with anger.

Next, the male guide sits quietly as the female uses a bowl of water to wash his hands. Each male is shown how to dip the fingers of his right hand into the water and wave the hand gracefully to dry. The Albatrossian woman resumes her position on the

**The interpretation phase of this simulation is unique to each group having the experience.**

floor next to the Albatrossian male for another pause. Then food is offered to the men and women participants.

The simulation involves several more interactions between guides and participants, including the choice of a woman with the largest feet to be another guide. All of these activities are accomplished with minimal sound. Only gestures, hissing, clicking, and humming are used to communicate. When all the events are concluded, the male and female Albatrossians bid the participants good-bye, bow, and leave the room.

*Processing.* The interpretation phase of this simulation is unique to each group having the experience. The general goal of learning to distinguish between description and interpretation of events may be approached in a variety of ways. What follows is a description of the way our UCSB students worked through the processing component.

When our student teachers realized that the "action" was over, they began to talk together quietly, uncertain of what they should do next. The facilitator (male guide) returned in his regular clothes to process the experience. His first question to the participants was, "What happened?" Students were quick to offer interpretations or evaluations of what had occurred, but the facilitator asked them to describe the actual sequence of events. Only after agreement was reached about what had happened were students given the opportunity to tell how they felt or what they thought it all meant. In this way the facilitator made explicit the distinction between description and interpretation of the events.

Two women who had decided to stop participating were given the opportunity to talk. The first said, "I just didn't want to take off my shoes." The second said, "I thought we were being initiated into a weird cult, and I didn't want to join without knowing what was really happening." Clearly, the anxiety of these two participants was a product of their own projections of meaning and interpretation of events. Several other students said that the ritual came from a male-dominated culture where females had to serve men and that participating made them feel angry and manipulated.

**The facilitator asked them to . . . write about . . . what they might have learned about themselves.**

As the various impressions and perceptions emerged, some students started to discuss the roles of men and women in our society and in their own families. The facilitator entered the discussion at this point and talked about the cultural assumptions on which he had developed the simulation. He said, "In this culture the earth is sacred. Only the women are considered pure enough to touch the earth." With this alternative interpretation many students began talking to their neighbors. The facilitator asked them to take out a piece of paper and write about how they felt, what they might have learned about themselves, and how their perceptions might have been shaped by their prior experience.<sup>2</sup>

Because few students in the group had considered that the women might be more revered in the simulated culture than the men, this exercise made many students uncomfortable. Particularly engaged were reentry female students who had only recently begun to question traditional American gender inequities. The students were challenged to question their prior understandings of male-female patterns of interaction and to think about how events might be interpreted when cultural assumptions are different. Thus, these student teachers began to be aware of ways in which their own cultural background influences how they see events and judge others.

Repeating this cultural simulation more recently, we have discovered that it has tended to produce more outward expressions of anger and frustration, perhaps because there is now greater awareness of gender inequity. Allowing students to voice their anger often helps discharge these emotions in positive ways. This catharsis is typified by an instance in which several women students described how their participation in a postgraduate teaching program broke familial norms. By attending school rather than staying home with children, they had been alienated from their traditional background. The other student teachers also gained new insights from hearing about the tensions in some women's lives. For example, they reflected on the behavior of children in their class whose academic ambitions often seemed less than their



**Through this simulation these prospective educators gained an observation tool that they could put to use in the field.**

abilities. Many began to consider the possibility that for some children an academic education might mean giving up traditional roles in the family. And although further education might be a means of self-improvement, it also might result in a painful loss of identity for such children.

Through this simulation these prospective educators gained an observation tool that they could put to use in the field. We often followed up this activity by asking the student teachers to gather observation data on their students during their field placements. Small groups of credential candidates were asked to decide on an aspect of classroom culture to be the focus of detailed observation. Later, the data organized by the groups were analyzed in class seminars. Supervisors partially assessed the success of the earlier Albatrossian simulation by evaluating the ability of student teachers to offer more than one interpretation of the descriptive classroom data.

### **Developing Empathy: Personal Story**

As suggested earlier, successful attempts to increase cultural awareness and sensitivity depend on using a systematic program design and taking advantage of teachable moments as they occur during the year. In methods classes and small-group seminars and throughout the bilingual course sequence, one of our greatest challenges has been to create an instructional climate that allows, encourages, and supports self-disclosure and personal story. Through direct contact with the authentic stories of their peers, our student teachers begin to construct a personal understanding of stereotyping and the leveling of expectations for all students, especially those of different abilities or cultures.

One way in which we have tried to encourage self-awareness and the building of empathy is to reserve one portion of our small-group seminar for a "go-around." In a part of every session, each student teacher has several minutes to speak without being interrupted while other students in the group practice active listening skills. The format of this exercise is similar to the support group

**We try to create a climate that supports personal risk taking and the sharing of personal experience.**

model used by such projects as the Math Project, the Early Equity Math and Science Project, and the South Coast Writing Project (Weissglass & Weissglass, 1987). We try to create a climate that supports personal risk taking and the sharing of personal experience because a climate of trust builds community and affords opportunities to develop empathy across differences.

Storytelling is an important way to create such a climate. At the beginning of this chapter, I shared a student teacher's description of her school experiences after her family migrated from Mexico to California. In the telling of this experience, she offered her colleagues a part of herself, hoping that her story would demonstrate the profound ways teachers' expectations affect students' success in school. This student teacher wanted her colleagues to hear how success in school had been fostered by a sense of family and belonging and how her self-esteem had been diminished as a result of her displacement to the United States.

Hearing this story from the person who lived it accentuated its emotional impact on the entire group. "I never knew" was a common response. This story also raised some important pedagogical questions for her student teacher peers. What might her U.S. teacher have done to support a better transition from one culture to another? How might the new school have reached out to the family to bring them into the school community? As we had hoped, student teachers who might never have thought about these issues began to feel the responsibility of working with students different from themselves and of reaching out to families across the chasm of different language and custom.

### **Interpersonal Awareness: Giving Voice to Immigrant Students**

This year, at the first meeting of the Social, Linguistic, and Cultural Factors in Teaching ESL course, student teachers took part in another new activity designed by their instructor, Ann Lippincott. They were given cards containing quotes taken from *Crossing the Schoolhouse Border* (Olsen & Chen, 1988). The words were those of an immigrant student or of a teacher of

immigrants or of a community worker familiar with immigrant families. The student teachers walked around the room, introduced themselves, and read the quotes on their cards. In this way voice was given to the type of new immigrants with whom our student teachers inevitably would be working.

During the succeeding discussion, Lucía, herself an immigrant to the United States, asked the following question:

How many of you have never heard this story before? . . . It is my story; and if it is not my story exactly, it is the story of people in my life.

In response to Lucía, many of her colleagues reported that they had never really known any minority people until they reached college and that, even then, their exposure had been minimal. Admission of this fact reaffirmed our assessment of the limited opportunities our student teachers had previously had for cross-group communication and contact. Despite the coexistence of multicultural and multilingual groups in Santa Barbara, cross-group communication had been rare. Such exercises provide a small beginning in helping our students bridge ethnic, cultural, and linguistic divisions in an environment that systematically maintains separation. But we have come to understand that efforts to raise awareness of cultural shaping and strengthen intergroup communication require systematic organized contact experiences to build essential knowledge and skills.

**Efforts to raise awareness of cultural shaping . . . require systematic organized contact experiences to build essential knowledge and skills.**

### **Cultural Plunge: A Walk in the Neighborhood of the School**

Each quarter we ask student teachers to walk through the neighborhood where their students live. This activity provides student teachers with a glimpse of the home lives of the children in their classes. Beth's story illustrates a student teacher awakening to new understandings. Her first description of the children's neighborhood may be understood in the context of her own experience, values, and feelings:

The area surrounding [this] elementary school that the students live in is not ideal. The students live in small apartments or old, run-down small houses without lawns or adequate play areas. The buildings are physically close to each other, set close to the street and surrounded by high chain-link fences. . . . There are a few corner stores that I've heard my students talking about; . . . apparently, they hang out there. The neighborhood obviously has a lot of gang activity. The walls of the buildings and houses are frequently tagged and vandalized by the East Side Gang. Driving through the neighborhood and talking with my students about their home lives make me sad. I can't imagine dealing with the issues that they do on a daily basis. It amazes me that they are able to focus as well as they do in the classroom.

Beth had a difficult time seeing the neighborhood from the point of view of the people who live there. It was only after talking to her students and getting to know them and their stories that she was able to see the neighborhood through the eyes of her students. The following paragraph contains excerpts from her second observation about the neighborhood:

The area surrounding [this] Elementary School is residential, comprised of older small single-story houses and double-story condominiums. The houses' exteriors are either stucco or paint, in a variety of colors with contrasting trim colors. Yards are enclosed by brick walls and wrought iron fences and gates. . . . Many of the houses have beautifully manicured rose or cactus gardens inside their gates. . . . There is a corner market, Pennywise, that my students frequent, buying Mexican hot chili candies, sodas, and chips. . . . It seems that neighbors help each other, stick up for each other, and take care of each other. There is definitely a small-town feeling to the community.

As Beth became more familiar with the children in her class, she seemed to be able to see them less from her own somewhat condescending perspective of pity and more from her students' own sense of pride in their community.

The activity of taking a culture plunge—of walking in a neighborhood that is unfamiliar and where one doesn't "belong" produced a degree of fear in several of our students:

I went through this neighborhood during the day as I would not feel as comfortable there after dark. This sense of insecurity may be real or imaginary; all I know is this is how I felt.

These expressions of fear provided an opportunity for my own learning. It forced me to question the assignment's value against my student teacher's fears. I asked myself if it was right for me to send young student teachers into neighborhoods where they would never go on their own. I thought, "Is there a potential risk to their safety? Is gaining an awareness of the culture of their students worth the risk? Furthermore, if student teachers have no purpose there other than to look at the people and their homes, is that disrespectful and intrusive? Is it trespassing?"

In seeking answers to these questions, I began a discussion with the student teachers in my small-group seminar. My questions about what they had gained from the neighborhood walk elicited reflections such as these from Vera and Patty about ways they felt that their new perceptions were influencing their work with children:

[Vera]: Just with the way their homes looked, I was able to sense the differences of where their background experiences were coming from. The neighborhood walk was a reminder for teachers to consider their students' environments in the lessons that would be presented in the classroom as well as better understand the child and his/her experience. A child's environment does influence performance in the class, and understanding circumstances in their environment and using them to advantage can make learning in the class even more fruitful.

[Patty]: Whether or not one wants to admit it, knowing the background of a student does influence how the teacher sees the student. . . .

**Patty realized how her behavior toward her students was influenced by [her assumptions about them].**

Patty had made an assumption about a child in her class who came to school with her clothes all crumpled and dirty. She was shocked to find out that the parents drove "one of the nicest, newest Porsches I've ever seen." Patty went on to say, "I was glad that I got to know C. for who she is rather than know, from the start, that her family had the money to buy a Porsche." Patty realized how her behavior toward her students was influenced by the assumptions she made about the children and, more important, how those assumptions might not always be correct. These and other responses of my student teachers reassured me that the assignment was valuable, despite some apparent risks.

**The [role-playing] situation is structured so that the “parent” has a different set of priorities for the student than the “teacher” has.**

### **Parent Conference Role Play**

In the UCSB program, seminars are held that focus on the involvement of families in different aspects of school life and on the role teachers play in creating partnerships with parents to benefit the student. Role-playing parent conferences is an activity we have used successfully with student teachers. The situation is structured so that the “parent” has a different set of priorities for the student than the “teacher” has. As in the activities summarized earlier, common assumptions of student teachers are challenged. This year, an actual case of parent-teacher conflict during a conference occurred in the class of Tess, one of our student teachers.

Tess had attended a parent conference involving a Native-American child. Tess’s master teacher had been experiencing difficulty with this boy because he never finished his work in the allotted time. He worked at his own pace and was thorough but not quick. The conference was called by the teacher to inform the parent of the difficulty and to see whether the parent could suggest any strategies to help the boy work faster. When confronted with the situation, the mother became agitated and spoke up:

Well, you are trying to teach him to hurry up, to do the work to be finished. In our culture we tell our children to take their time, to work for the joy of doing it well, and to pay attention to how the job is done, not how fast he can finish.

Tess came to me with this situation and many questions:

What should I do? How do the conflicting values of parent and school impact the boy’s learning? Will he learn in school that his parents’ values are unworthy? Will he learn in school that his culture’s way is not appropriate? How will he be able to be successful in one without denying the value of the other?

This situation became the background for the role-playing carried out in our student teaching seminar. Student teachers took turns being the parent or the teacher. When they spoke as the parent, they began to understand how the school culture could be threatening to the traditional values of different cultures. Some participants were able to feel the tension and distress of the parent

who had to confront the teacher's cultural assumptions but possessed little power in the school setting. Playing the role of the teacher, they began to understand how they might be seen to represent the majority culture or how their recognition of culturally conditioned ways of behaving might be vital to various students' success in their classrooms.

Tess's questions showed a recognition of the ways in which issues of cultural diversity are connected to the home-school relationship. Her awareness was followed by inquiry and positive, culturally sensitive action. After the parent-teacher conference, the student in Tess's classroom was given more time to complete his work. The teacher reminded the boy, however, that although he should do his best work, he should try to work within the time allotted for the task. Thus, he received support while he learned to live in two worlds, as many minority students have done. Tess learned that when the teacher confronts the situation with respect for the values of the home, one of those worlds is no longer invisible.

## Emergent Issues

The previously described activities and strategies have emerged as a result of our efforts to raise cultural awareness and to increase appreciation of diversity so that future teachers will be equipped to work effectively with all families. We have paid special attention to the intricate connection between issues of diversity and the involvement of parents as partners with schools. We began with some assumptions about the need for students to gain an awareness of personal cultural shaping and the ways in which their own perceptions of events are filtered through the values they hold. Because personal values and cultural shaping are often implicit and taken for granted as reality, the activities and events planned by instructors and supervisors have been designed to make those value orientations explicit. This level of awareness is an essential foundation for any cross-group communication. It has taken us several years to develop activities that would success-



**Appreciation of difference does not ensure that new teachers will reach out to all parents or include parents as partners in their students' education.**

fully produce this personal awareness outcome. Yet we have found it to be only the first step in the bigger journey of helping teachers learn how to create partnerships with families. Fostering this type of knowledge has turned out to be even more complicated than we anticipated.

Consciousness of the way culture shapes our own perceptions and social relationships leads to an awareness of how it shapes other people if personal contact and authentic interaction occur between people who have different orientations or perspectives. Thus, we have attempted, through activities and events that have been described, to establish contact across groups and to encourage the climate of trust and caring that authentic communication requires. Because there is limited contact between diverse ethnic and cultural groups at UCSB, we have employed such strategies as cultural simulations, placement in schools with significant percentages of students of color, and cultural plunges to increase the likelihood of contact.

These events and activities have been mostly successful. Yet it appears that we have only begun the task at hand. Although we have increased the likelihood that our students will appreciate their own cultural shaping and have greater empathy toward different groups, we have barely moved beyond awareness in helping them learn to interact with parents. Appreciation of difference does not ensure that new teachers will reach out to all parents or include parents as partners in their students' education.

## Directions for the Future

It seems reasonable to ask the following questions of student teachers who have completed the awareness-raising activities: What will you do as teachers now that you realize that students with different backgrounds bring different ways of knowing to your classroom? How will you put to use your new appreciation of diversity? In fact, Ann Lippincott poses this crucial question in the Bilingual Procedures and ESL course. Responses to her assigned "quick write" "What Can I Do?" are enlightening. Many student

teachers spontaneously made the connection between children's success in school and their parents' partnerships with the school:

- Another important resource in providing a good education are parents. No matter what language my students or their parents speak, I would want to involve parents in their children's education. I do not want language to be a barrier but an opportunity to learn more.
- I will talk to parents about their important role in their child's education, [ask parents to] read to them and with them, [suggest that parents] ask children to write grocery lists, and encourage education at home as well as in class.
- I will make sure parents know what their children are learning so that they can help at home.
- I would like to volunteer my time to teach ESL to parents so that they can feel more confident in their abilities to help their children and be able to participate in PTA or other community-type organizations.
- I can find someone to help me communicate with the parents of the child so that they feel connected to the education of their child. I can bring into the classroom activities that honor the culture of the child.
- I will provide reading materials in the first language for home use, . . . contact parents of the students, try to have formal and informal get-togethers, . . . stay in touch, [and] respect and celebrate the various different cultures and languages of the classroom.

**We need to give priority to providing student teachers with practice in communicating with parents and in creating partnerships that focus on assisting students' efforts to learn.**

All of the comments that focused on interacting with parents were a welcome surprise. Our students seem to have bridged the two themes of this chapter—appreciation of diversity and family involvement. As a program, however, we have yet to provide significant practice in making contact with parents. That is the important direction for the future. Although we may have been successful in creating an appreciation of difference and a desire to take action, we must not be satisfied. Now we need to give priority to providing student teachers with practice in communicating with parents and in creating partnerships that focus on assisting students' efforts to learn. The final part of this chapter describes recent attempts to take this step.

## Connecting University Preparation to Classroom Practice

**To move student teachers beyond a simple disposition to involve parents in partnership, a few years ago I included a requirement for student teachers to contact parents or caregivers.**

To move student teachers beyond a simple disposition to involve parents in partnership, a few years ago I included a requirement for student teachers to contact parents or caregivers as part of a case study assessment of primary emergent literacy. I was surprised that many comments in class were negative about the effort involved in such an assignment. One student casually stated: "My teacher doesn't want me contacting the children's parents. She says that they will think that the child did something wrong." My response was without question the strongest statement I have ever made in class and certainly surprised the student teacher because it was not in my normal calm tone of voice: "That is exactly the type of old thinking that we must change! If a teacher only makes contact with the home when the child is having some sort of difficulty, it's no wonder that parents think a call home means the child is in trouble. We need to change those expectations!"

My frustration was evident. The student teachers were quiet. I continued: "If your cooperating teacher has a problem with the assignment, please tell her to call me; or I will call her. I don't want you caught in the middle." To my horror I found myself responding in the same negative manner as those who do not appreciate differences. I wasn't respecting the position of the field teacher. I wasn't treating our relationship as a partnership.

Supervising teachers' understanding of their role and that of the home in educating children significantly influences the nature of school-home relationships modeled for student teachers. In many cases master teachers are part of a traditional school culture that views teaching as the responsibility of the school, not the parent. In such a culture the purpose of communication between the home and school frequently appears focused on maintaining discipline or on informing parents of the child's achievement, not on sharing experiences that might give insight into joint educational efforts. Because the possibility of differences in perspective

**Because the possibility of differences in perspective about parent involvement exists, teacher educators must initiate dialogue with K-12 educators.**

about parent involvement exists, teacher educators must initiate dialogue with K-12 educators. Field placement teachers and university teacher educators need to expand communications about the roles of teachers and parents and the goals of family involvement. The culture of the school and the culture of the university are different. Working together, we will be better able to support the growth of student teachers who must learn how to bridge the differences in school-home cultures.

A considerable amount of change has occurred in the structure of the teacher education program at UCSB in the past two years. Given the disconnection between the culture of the university and the culture of the school, university-school partnerships have been established with three schools where a majority of our student teachers are placed for student teaching. Monthly meetings have been set up involving faculty from each of the schools, the principals, and UCSB supervisors. By providing a regular communication interchange, the two cultures are beginning to find common ground for the education of prospective teachers. Schools are also learning from one another. For example, one of the districts involved in the partnership has shared information about its kindergarten parent-school liaison program. This program has provided our students not only with hands-on experience in interacting with families but also with a clear model of a successful home-school partnership activity.

Like children and university students, teacher educators experience disequilibrium in the process of acquiring new ways of thinking. Through recognizing the discomfort of the student teachers and supervising teachers with whom I work, I have continued to be confronted with my own inadequate understanding of teaching diverse populations of students. I have experienced my colleagues' developing awareness as a reciprocal process in myself.

At UCSB we recognize the need to incorporate a more regular programmatic approach to family involvement and communicate its importance to our students. Accomplishment of this goal will require continued dialogue and joint planning with the supervising

teachers and other school personnel. Working together, we will be more likely to succeed in preparing teachers to serve children and families from diverse backgrounds.

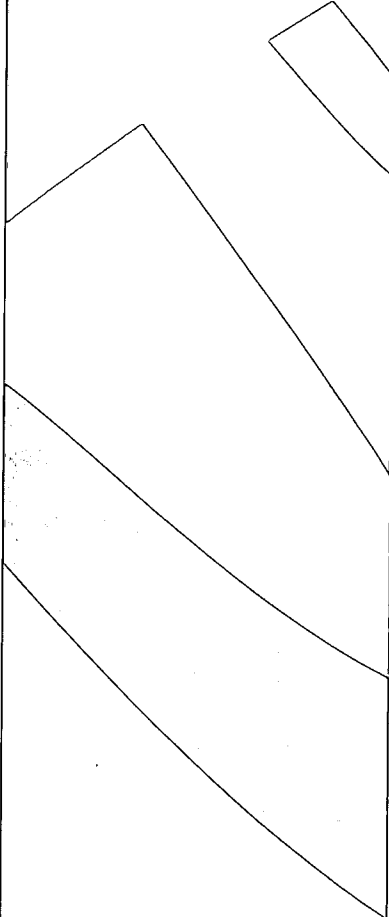
## References

- Brown, G. I. (1972/1990). *Human teaching for human learning*. Highland, NY: The Gestalt Journal Press.
- Children now county data book*. (1993). Oakland, CA: Children Now.
- Edelman, M. (1992). *The measure of our success: A letter to my children and yours*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Guthrie, J. W., Kirst, M., Odden, A., Koppich, J., et al. (1992). *Conditions of education in California 1991* (Policy Paper No. PP92-5-1). Berkeley, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE).
- Kagan, D. M. (1992). Professional growth among preservice and beginning teachers. *Review of Educational Research*, 62, 129-169.
- Kids count data book 1995*. Baltimore: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- Krathwohl, D. R., Bloom, B. S., & Masia, B. B. (1964). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals (Handbook II: Affective domain)*. New York: Longman.
- Olsen, L., & Chen, M. (1988). *Crossing the schoolhouse border: Immigrant students and the California public schools*. San Francisco: California Tomorrow.
- Piaget, J. (1952). *The origins of intelligence in children*. Lido Beach, NY: International Universities Press.
- Rosegrant, T., & Cooper, R. (1986). *The talking text writer: Professional guide*. New York: Scholastic.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Weissglass, J., & Weissglass, T. (1987). *Learning, feelings, and educational change*. Santa Barbara, CA: Kimberly Press.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This simulation was originally used by Dan Smith in the College of International Studies at UCSB.

<sup>2</sup> This process, known as a "quick write," is used by the South Coast Writing Project and in teacher education course work where reflective practice is encouraged.



# Preparing Teachers to Connect Home and School: Learning About the Sociocultural Contexts of Teaching and Learning

**Paula F. Levin**

University of California, San Diego

**... Those preparing for careers as teachers  
need to develop ways to learn about students'  
lives outside school and to make use of that  
knowledge.**

**T**RADITIONALLY, TEACHER TRAINING programs have focused on preparing teachers to work effectively with students, with little (if any) emphasis on helping them to interact effectively with the families of their students. Recently, the California Legislature mandated that this often-neglected aspect of teacher training be addressed when it directed the Commission on Teacher Credentialing “to adopt standards and requirements that emphasize the preparation of prospective teachers and other certificated educators to serve as active partners with the parents and guardians of their pupils” (*Education Code* Section 44261.2).

### About the Author

**Paula Levin** is Graduate Adviser and Lecturer in Teacher Education and directs the Master's Degree Program in Teaching and Learning at UC San Diego. She previously taught at Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Hawaii, Manoa, and served as research anthropologist at the Center for the Development of Early Education at the Kamehameha Schools in Honolulu. As a member of the Culture and Learning Department at the Center, she received the Kimball Award for developing and assessing educational programs for young native Hawaiian children.

**The program provides three occasions for learning about families and community.**

At the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), the prospect of new requirements for teacher preparation in parent involvement has strengthened and validated some existing teacher training practices. Since its beginning in 1972, the Teacher Education Program at UCSD has provided several opportunities for prospective teachers to become knowledgeable about effective family-school interaction. In fact, an underlying principle of the program is that those preparing for careers as teachers need to develop ways to learn about students' lives outside school and to make use of that knowledge.

The program provides three occasions for learning about families and communities. During the credential year student teachers learn strategies for working with families by participating with their cooperating teacher in such activities as Family Math night and report card conferences and by helping to coordinate parent volunteers in the classroom. But there are two other times in the program when UCSD students participate in less traditional activities that help them learn about the lives of children in their classes and apply these understandings to instruction. One opportunity occurs during the precredential year; the other, within the graduate Master of Arts Program in Teaching and Learning.

Precredential students begin learning about the sociocultural contexts of learning by collecting data about the community and families served by the schools in which those students are volunteering. At this stage students propose curricular activities that reflect knowledge gained about that community. During the credential year student teachers engage in activities organized by their cooperating teacher that involve parents. Full-time teachers in the master's degree program examine the research literature and propose new curricular approaches to involving families in school activities. They then develop innovative activities, implement them, and evaluate their effectiveness. Thus, at three different levels—in the precredential practicum, during student teaching,



and at the graduate level—UCSD students engage in activities that broaden their understanding of the connection between home and school.

In addition, program activities are designed to connect students' learning at these different levels. For example, teachers in the master's degree program present their curriculum development projects to precredential students as part of a requirement to explain relationships between educational research and practice. Such presentations also effectively model for the undergraduates ways in which teachers can enhance the connection between themselves and families and create learning activities that better serve children's needs. This "vertical integration" of UCSD students from different levels of the program (i.e., precredential students, student teachers, and master's degree students) seems to provide family and community experiences that are appropriate for teachers at different stages of their training. Some of the knowledge and skills we hope students will acquire in working with family involvement will be more apparent as additional details are provided about the activities undertaken in the precredential sequence and in the master's degree program.

## **The Precredential Practicum: Introduction to the Contexts of Learning**

UC San Diego students have their first experiences in making connections among school, family, and community during a yearlong field placement course that they take before they are admitted to the credential program. The Practicum in Learning has been a part of elementary-level teacher preparation at UCSD since the program's inception in 1972. In this course prospective teachers work intensively in three different public elementary school classrooms. During each of the three quarters, these undergraduates observe, tutor, and teach small groups of students while under the supervision of an experienced classroom teacher. The precredential program participants spend six to eight hours a week inside a classroom. This length of time is sufficient for them to

engage in actual teaching and learning activities and to apply ideas relating to the educational process.

The yearlong practicum is important in helping precredential students make connections between theory and practice before they are responsible for (and perhaps overwhelmed by) overall classroom management. Therefore, we encourage them to take advantage of their unique and temporary role in schools to watch classroom interaction, talk to students, and discuss ongoing practice with teachers. This extended opportunity for making sense of what goes on in classrooms provides a necessary foundation for future good practice because it provides hands-on experience and demystifies some of the complex interactions that make up teaching and learning.

Besides providing hands-on experience in elementary-level teaching, the practicum has another important goal: to develop an inquiry-based and *contextualized* understanding of teaching and learning. Through this approach course participants engage in a variety of activities that enhance their understanding of a classroom's social and community contexts. In each placement prospective teachers discover the institutional (classroom, school, district, state, and national) and personal features that constrain or enhance children's learning. To this end they attend school board meetings, read local newspapers, participate in home-school events, interview school personnel, observe students inside and outside the classroom, document the roles and duties of adults in the school, interview members of the community who work with children outside the school setting, attend community events, and make a detailed record of the physical and social organization of the school and its surrounding community. These activities culminate in a social portrait of the school and its community. We expect students to use their collected data to analyze the school's institutional resources and constraints, to determine ways the school is currently connected to the community, and to suggest ways a teacher might organize learning to create or take advantage of existing ties.

**We expect students to use their collected data to analyze the school's institutional resources and constraints.**

### **Assignment of the School-Community Connection Project**

During the fall and winter quarters, precredential students document their experiences in a written description of the school and community. The instructions for the project include a general eliciting topic with multiple suggestions or questions to be investigated. In the fall quarter the activities for the program focus more explicitly on the community setting of the school; in the winter quarter the emphasis shifts to the school itself and its connection to the families it serves. Table 1 contains the text of the assignment that is presented at the beginning of the fall quarter.

During the second quarter prospective teachers continue to investigate the relationship between the school and community. In particular they explore the various ways in which their school both encourages and discourages the participation of families in their children's school life. The directions for the winter quarter's assignment include the following comments and suggestions for activities:

Schools differ in the stance they take vis-à-vis the community. As a new teacher you will want to learn how your school facilitates the involvement of families and the community in the activities of the school. Through observation and informal discussion with your teacher, find out the answers to these questions:

- Why and in what capacity do parents and other community members come to school?
- Who organizes and who participates in these activities?
- Why, according to school staff, are such activities held?
- How successful are they believed to be?

Attend one school event (such as a PTA or school site meeting, assembly, student performance, Family Math program, or other parent involvement activity) and describe your observations. Some questions you might keep in mind are What happened? Who attended the event? What was its purpose? Was that goal achieved?

**Table 1.**  
**WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT FOR THE SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PROJECT**

Just as classrooms exist in the context of a school, so too are schools a part of communities. The community can become a rich resource for your experiences, building on students' prior knowledge and interests. You also can make use of community resources, people, and activities to enhance your teaching. Effective teaching and learning activities build on learners' knowledge and values. Thus, "localizing" instruction is one strategy that successful teachers use in presenting new concepts to students. In addition, finding out about children's lives outside school conveys respect.

The activities listed below are designed to help you gain some understanding of the experiences of your students outside school. By carrying out and reflecting on these activities, you should have a better sense of the lives of your children, both in school and in the community. The goal of this project is to help you devise some classroom-based activities that connect with your students' experiences away from school.

### **COMMUNITY DATA COLLECTION**

#### **The Neighborhood of Your School**

What teaching and learning resources are available in the community of your school? Can you think of ways to enhance your teaching by making use of what you have seen in the neighborhood or found out by talking to those familiar with the community? Which events, people, landmarks, or resources could you draw on to create effective learning experiences for your students? In addition to making your observations, talk with students in the neighborhood. What do children see on their way to and from school? What do they know about the neighborhood that you might build on in classroom learning?

Using children's descriptions and your observations, sketch a map of the community of the school, noting buildings, businesses, services, and activities located there. Be sure to include all the communities in which students in your classroom live, an important consideration for magnet schools. In addition, write a narrative describing and summarizing the important features of your students' neighborhood(s).

#### **Learning Outside Schools**

Children learn from many people in addition to parents and teachers. Find out what out-of-school activities are organized for children in the community. What types of learning go on in these settings? Who are some people in the community who help children learn? Talk to children in your class to find out which people they learn from in addition to parents, other family members, and the teacher.

Talk with at least one person who works with children in the community (either in a paid or a volunteer position) to obtain his or her perspective on children, learning, and the school. If at all possible, visit an out-of-school setting in which children participate in organized activities. Write a description of the range of community activities and a summary of your interview with a community worker, and describe your observations of children participating in organized out-of-school activities.

#### **Public Life in the Community**

Another setting for students' lives out of school is the public arena. What kinds of public events exist in your students' community? Who participates in these events? When and why are they held? Attend at least one such event (examples include sporting competitions, parades, street fairs, or church events) and describe the activities, in particular, children's involvement in them. What did you learn about the community by attending this event? What do you think that children learn by attending these events?

Write a summary of the kinds of organized public activities that occur in the neighborhood of the school and describe their features and types of participation. In addition, describe those event(s) you observed.

## **Outcomes of the School-Community Project: Student Observations and Insights**

**Being exposed to an unfamiliar school and community setting jolts undergraduates out of the notion that all classrooms are the same.**

Some prospective teachers exploring a school's surrounding community have difficulty in making sense of that setting, particularly if the community differs appreciably from those familiar to them. This reaction can be considered a type of "culture shock," with both positive and negative aspects. Being exposed to an unfamiliar school and community setting jolts undergraduates out of the notion that all classrooms are the same. By being encouraged to examine the world outside the classroom, they cannot avoid noting that children and teachers live in varied communities and that the nature of these contexts affects life in the classroom. In the following excerpt, one UCSD student presents a vivid portrait of the community surrounding the school:

When sitting amidst the schoolroom's structured decor of desk tans and chalkboard greens, the outside world is almost forgotten, almost . . . except for the rumble of freeway traffic one block away and the blaring horns of angry motorists. Central's campus is two blocks east of I-15 and one block north of one of San Diego's busiest avenues, University. . . . Once one makes it past 40th, heading west, there are many single family homes and apartments, no doubt housing many of Central and Wilson's clientele. . . . Most of these dwellings are fairly well kept with grass yards and, though some appear worse for wear or landlord neglect, a church on 39th and Dwight rationalizes the situation on its billboard, "God sometimes puts us in the dark to prove that He is the light."

. . . The most remarkable sight in the neighborhood is a community garden between University and Polk on 40th Street. Protected by a chain link fence and some intimidating giant wooden carrots engaged in a jig, the garden is an attempt to foster feelings of ownership, pride, and industry in the community. Each time I pass the garden, someone is tending or tilling, and by the well-kept appearance of the crops, it is obvious that the people appreciate the project.

Our precredential students seem to take the data collection aspect of the practicum project seriously, discovering community resources even within the school setting, as the following comments reveal:

During the lunch break of my last day at Laurel Elementary, . . . I had the opportunity to speak with a custodian. This older Hispanic man (he appeared to be sixtyish) told me that he had lived near the school all his life. Obviously, he has seen some changes. In fact, Laurel Elementary didn't even exist during most of the time he has lived in the area. According to him, the Hispanic population (by far the majority) around Laurel calls the area *Barrio Pozole*. Apparently, the mesa, hills, and canyons used to have small round rocks strewn about them. These rocks resembled hominy, and there is a Mexican soup (called *pozole*) that used large grits that are small and round like these same rocks. Thus, the term of endearment, *pozole*, to represent the barrio.

In addition as a result of being encouraged to take a closer look at the surrounding community of the school, many prospective teachers seem to develop a more empathic understanding of the children with whom they work. One of our precredentialed students wrote:

I know for myself, I feel an attachment to Central School that I would not have felt if I had not driven around the neighborhood and made my community map. I would not have understood the hardships the parents of these children endured had I not spoken with them myself. I would not have understood the difficulties the children face in a classroom had I not seen them [the circumstances] myself.

**These practicum activities do not by themselves make all precredentialed students feel greater insight or empathy for others.**

These practicum activities do not by themselves make all precredentialed students feel greater insight or empathy for others. The experiences and writings of some serve as important reminders of the need for extensive support of the activities and discussion of observations. Without assistance in carrying out and making sense of the community and school activities, some prospective teachers find the experience of exploring an unfamiliar environment so frightening or bewildering that they retreat into stereotypes and unsupported preconceptions.

In past years other activities within the community project have included visiting stores in the community, reading newspapers distributed there, and walking or riding the bus home with students. Sometimes, we have asked precredentialed students to analyze the public image of the community as portrayed in the

mass media. For that activity students use varied strategies to construct a public portrait of the community. The assignment states:

For example, you can keep track of everything you read in the newspapers or hear on radio or television that concerns the community in which your school is located. You might compare the images that emerge from different sources, such as regional or city versus community newspapers. Another strategy might be to characterize the portrait that emerges from "official" information about the community, such as maps, census figures, newcomer's booklets, and tourist information.

**Students use varied strategies to construct a public portrait of the community.**

Many students were intrigued by the idea of a social construction of community identity. One pointed out that schools as well as communities have a vested interest in the particular images they project:

University City is a community that portrays itself as being supportive of education, progressive, well-to-do, sports-minded, and concerned. An article in the recent *University City Light* dealt with a fight between two students at the high school. In an ironic show of concern, school officials went to great lengths to stress that the fight was over a drug deal gone wrong and not a racially motivated incident.

A second student reported two different representations of the community of the school in which he volunteered, each claiming validity as the real image of the community:

There are two portraits I got of the local community. The first was that San Ysidro is a sort of halfway house between Mexico and the United States (from local merchants and the Chamber of Commerce). San Ysidro is tagged the World's Busiest Land Port of Entry by the Chamber of Commerce. The community is the last city prior to the International Border. . . . Tourism is abundant, and the community of San Ysidro caters to the 40 million people who pass through the world's busiest land port every year. Fast-food restaurants, tourist information centers, money exchange booths, and Mexican insurance booths are ubiquitous. . . .

The community of San Ysidro is the transportation center from and to Mexico—this is one portrait. The other is not so pretty. . . . The other public image of S.Y. is of the depressed, downtrodden,



**This assignment can, with guidance, lead to a growing sophistication about the complexity of the goals, images, and resources of communities.**

low-income, Hispanic community whose claim to fame is the McDonald's massacre seven years ago. . . . "Do you know what they call this place?" a school counselor asked me, not looking for a response. He answered his own question and concomitantly summarized perfectly the second public image of the community, "San Y-Skid Row."

These and the observations cited earlier suggest that this assignment can, with guidance, lead to a growing sophistication about the complexity of the goals, images, and resources of communities.

### **Applying Knowledge of the Community to Teaching and Learning**

In the next part of the School-Community Connection Project, precredentialed students suggest ways to make connections between the information they have collected about the community and students' lives on the one hand and classroom teaching and learning activities on the other. Thus, this task presents prospective teachers with their first chance to apply their understandings about the sociocultural context of learning. However, it is designed to require a low level of responsibility. It asks only that classroom activities be proposed, not implemented. The wording of the assignment provides substantial guidance by suggesting questions to be considered and additional references to be consulted. Instructions such as those in Table 2 encourage students to adapt their knowledge of a community to practices in the classroom.

After completing this part of the practicum, many of the prospective teachers comment on the underutilization of available community resources. Discussions with public librarians, recreation center directors, and religious leaders, among others, make the prospective teachers aware of how infrequently schools take full advantage of the possibilities that community institutions offer, especially those with an educational commitment. Viewing the community through a learning lens seems to inspire the participants to suggest numerous creative ways to capitalize on local

**Viewing the community through a learning lens . . . suggest[s] numerous creative ways to capitalize on local resources for enriching children's learning.**

**Table 2.**  
**SAMPLE ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS**  
**FOR APPLICATION OF SOCIOCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Identify some features of the community that might affect teaching and learning in the classroom.
- Explain how community resources and characteristics might be used to create more effective teaching and learning in your classroom.
- Explain how classroom activities might draw on community resources or make connections with your students' experiences outside school.
- Give your ideas about teaching that come from knowing what children do in organized settings outside school.
- Explain how you might incorporate into your classroom teaching what you learned in doing your school-community project.
- Design some specific contextualized classroom activities to show how you might draw on and apply your knowledge of this community and your students' experiences when they are not in school.
- Provide in your written presentation a rationale, a description of the process, and proposed outcomes of the activities.

resources for enriching children's learning. As one prospective teacher remarked:

I have noticed a couple of things that might also be useful as community resources. First, there is a garden at the corner of 40th and Polk. I think that the science unit on plants could be centered around this garden by having the children help the owners of the garden plant and maintain it. Right now, the children have planted their own seeds in Dixie cups, but I think the garden would provide a more interesting setting for the lesson.

Recently, we have started encouraging prospective teachers in the practicum sequence to take the next step in learning how to make home-school connections. They apply their newly acquired knowledge of the school and community to classroom curricular activities or to useful products for the school or community. We

provide the following guidelines to help students organize implementation activities:

In place of the activities described previously, you may propose to carry out an individual or collaborative project expressing your understanding of the community and the school your students attend. Some possible projects include curricular activities, intensive study of one topic, or the creation of useful school resources. To be considered for this option, you must complete a written project proposal that includes the names of the project organizers, the school site, the project title, a brief rationale for and a description of the project, a timetable, and the expected outcomes. The proposal needs my written approval as well as that of your cooperating classroom teacher and school principal, if appropriate.

In recent years students in the precredential practicum have:

- Written, published, and disseminated bilingual orientation guides about the school and community for newly arrived families
- Assisted students in creating a school newspaper focused on a school and its community
- Created videos that introduce the school to incoming children
- Organized a tree-planting activity on the school grounds with the collaboration of a local nursery
- Collected children's thoughts about the school and community, set these words to music, and helped the class learn the songs
- Helped a classroom organize a clothing and food drive for homeless children in the community
- Established a letter-writing and visiting schedule between a school and a neighborhood nursing home
- Created a mathematics board game based on features of the local community
- Organized a video record of the activities of the school for its program review exemplifying the school's multicultural efforts

**Collaborative effort seems to produce projects that are better researched and more thoroughly considered.**

### **Working Collaboratively**

While students are collecting data for their school connections projects, we encourage them to work together to create a portrait of the community and the school. Collaborative effort seems to produce projects that are better researched and more thoroughly considered. Elementary teachers are encouraged to organize varied classroom activities to include pairs and small groups of students as well as individuals and the whole class. New teachers may find themselves arranging classes into groupings with which they personally have had little experience. Thus, university students who choose to work collaboratively in the practicum course develop an appreciation of the benefits and challenges of group work that complements their understanding of individual effort. Students were given the following assignment:

You are encouraged to work collaboratively with another student at your school site. Each of you must participate in every activity, but you may write one collaborative paper. Those students submitting collaborative papers should take care to include details about how each individual participated in the activities. Conclude your jointly created paper with each person's description of his or her contributions to the final product and any comments about the collaborative process.

One pair of students wrote the following evaluation of the collaborative process, noting both the pros and cons of such joint work:

The division of labor made [writing] the school log faster and easier. Each of us only had to do half the writing. But with the division of labor came the process of coordinating efforts. We met several times and discussed at length the log and our drafts. With the diminished quantity of writing, the interactive process required the efforts of scheduling and meeting, which are absent in individualistic efforts. Reading each other's drafts and verbally discussing the content led us to find, examine, and revise parts of the log which would have gone unchallenged. From this project, we concluded that the process was

faster [and] easier, [and] we learned as much, if not more, than [we would] had we gone about the log independently. . . . Our final project is perhaps a better log than [it would have been] had we attempted it individually. It is important to note that this is the first time [either of us] has done any truly collaborative work at the university level. It is unfortunate that such an effective process is so markedly absent.

### **Broadening Understandings of Sociocultural Contexts for Learning**

As the previous discussion indicates, precredentialed students learn to make connections between home and school by becoming informed about the community in which children live. Through discussions and in writing, they construct a social portrait of the community, focusing on those features that provide actual or potential learning opportunities for children. As part of their classroom observations, our undergraduates look for ways in which teachers acknowledge or build on students' lives and then try to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction considering the presence or absence of these connections. Finally, they propose and in some cases carry out classroom activities that attempt to make these connections.

What do our undergraduates learn by participating in this practicum? The activities of the School-Community Connection Project challenge prospective teachers' current understandings and beliefs about teaching and learning by asking them to create a *contextualized* view of instruction. They learn specific strategies that they as teachers can use in learning about their students' worlds. Many good teachers use these procedures in getting to know a school setting or new group of students and their families so that they can interconnect children's experiences inside and outside the classroom.

To help our students think more broadly about making connections between the community and the classroom, we encourage them to read reports of research studies that suggest:

**They learn specific strategies that they as teachers can use in learning about their students' worlds.**

- The effectiveness of classroom activities that build on students' prior experiences and existing knowledge (for example, Bruer, 1993; Collins, Brown, & Hollum, 1991; Leinhardt, 1992)
- The importance of conveying respect for each student's family and culture (Katz, 1993)
- Ways of tapping local resources for learning (Moll, 1992, on communities as funds of knowledge)
- Procedures for contributing to the community through school activities (Schack, 1993)

An interesting, although somewhat discouraging, response has sometimes come from the schools in which the precredentialed students volunteer. Some of the most skeptical critics of the school-community projects have been the supervising classroom teachers. Each year our students report that their supervising teachers tell them that walking or driving around the community is not safe. They report that some school personnel question the need to collect data about the community and advise them that neither the skills nor the information will be necessary when they become teachers.

The classes and discussions within the program become important arenas for examining these differing viewpoints. Of course we caution prospective teachers not only to be prudent in their community explorations but also to realize that children travel daily through the streets that many consider too risky. Involving the teachers from the master's degree program in these discussions allows the precredentialed students to question other experienced teachers about the realities of trying to engage in the life of the school's community. Typically, the graduate students comment that working to make connections to families and communities is both difficult and time-consuming. However, they also invariably say that these activities are not only possible to conduct but vital for creating effective classroom practice.

## Graduate Student Curriculum Projects: Creating Learning-Centered Connections with Families

UC San Diego offers experienced teachers the opportunity to create innovative research-based classroom activities as part of a master's degree program in teaching and learning. During the 15-month sequence teachers first make a case for an educational innovation by assessing how well students are learning in a particular content area and then review curricula currently in use. They examine the relevant research on teaching and learning, creating a proposal for curricular change. Next, they design and implement activities that exemplify their approach and determine the effectiveness of the innovation through a variety of evaluation strategies. Several students have chosen the home-school connection as the focus for their research and curriculum projects. Two examples of such curricular innovations are Natalie Weston's (1992) "Home-School Library" and E. Eck's (1993) "Math to Go" (see the list of references in this article).

In creating her home-school library, N. Weston went beyond the concept of the traditional school lending library. In her model, students and their families were encouraged to become *contributors* to the library's collection of materials. Families participated in a number of literacy-related activities, such as contributing entries to class books or family journals, writing short stories, and recording audiotaped stories or interviews. These materials became part of the home-school library and, as such, were available for all students to borrow and use at home. As Weston writes, "By creating their own books, stories, and other materials, children and their families will learn from each other and from other important people in their lives. By incorporating and validating culturally appropriate and meaningful texts and materials, the home-school library will create a link between the learning activities that take place at school and at home" (p. 27).

"Math to Go," created by E. Eck, is an open-ended kindergarten through grade six curriculum that links students' home and school experiences through mathematical activities. The activities



**In both of these projects, students and their families joined the teacher in creating the curricular materials and activities to be used at school as well as at home.**

involve families in mathematical conversations and support awareness of the relevance of mathematics in everyday life. "The curriculum includes students becoming photojournalists (capturing mathematical events outside of school and writing about them), interviewers (tape recording family mathematical traditions), and inventors (creating their own mathematical games)" (Eck, 1993, p. x). Students work with family members to explore mathematical concepts embedded in daily life, and these home projects form the basis of classroom mathematics activities.

In both of these projects, students and their families joined the teacher in creating the curricular materials and activities to be used *at school* as well as at home. The jointly constructed activities and associated materials helped connect home and school, families and teachers.

These two projects, like others from students in the master's degree program, have been presented in the lecture series segment of the Practicum in Learning field placement course for precredential students. During their presentations, these practicing teachers described the activities they created as well as the research and theory that guided their designs. Such interactions between experienced and prospective teachers reinforce for both the conception of teaching as ongoing research on instructional practice. In addition, these innovative curriculum projects concretely illustrate ways to make connections to the broader context of children's lives and show the benefits of such teaching practices.

Students in the master's degree program are encouraged to create videotaped accounts of their curriculum projects as a way to gain experience in presenting their ideas in a variety of media. Videos such as those created by Weston and Eck have successfully conveyed the philosophical underpinnings and the logistics of making home-school connections. Staff members in teacher-training programs with limited access to experienced teachers as guest lecturers might show videotapes of exemplary teacher practices, such as those of Weston and Eck, to promote useful discussions about activities teachers create for family involvement.

## A Contextualized Perspective of Teaching and Learning: Other Outcomes

The activities described in this article seem to assist students in developing not only a contextualized view of teaching and learning but a critical stance as well. Helping preservice students to develop increasingly complex understandings of classroom life contributes to these students' becoming critical practitioners. Rather than expecting students to begin teacher training with a critical perspective on schooling, we first discover what students already know and believe and then scaffold later learning on these understandings (Bruner, 1978). The alternative is to bemoan the fact that students are not socially aware or culturally sensitive to issues in schooling when they begin their work with us.

**A critical  
perspective . . .  
is necessary but  
not sufficient.**

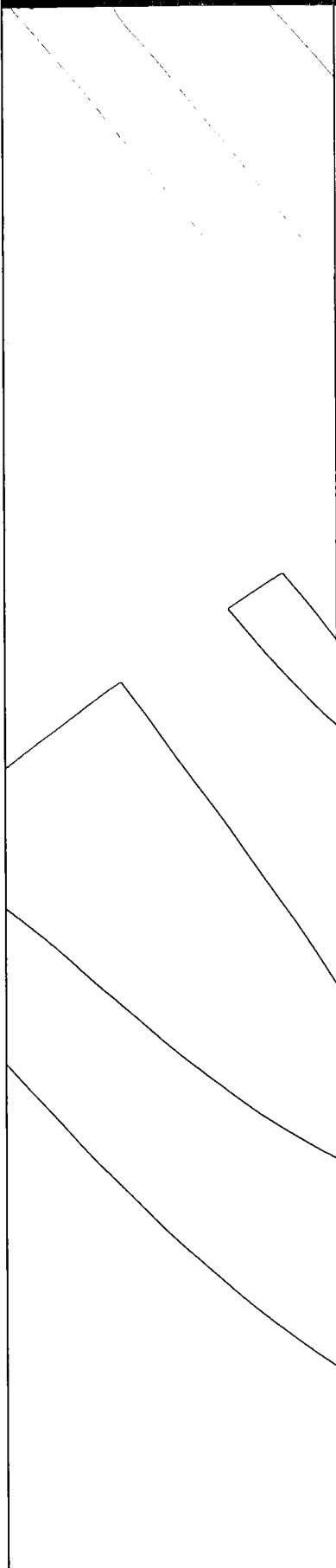
The development of awareness or sensitivity obviously does not have a unique set of practices or beliefs. Rather, people come to divergent views after serious reflection. Even if a critical perspective makes for better teaching, that perspective is necessary but not sufficient. Beginning teachers need to be exposed to strategies for making changes; otherwise, they may become teachers who are able to articulate "what's wrong with schools" but will have little idea about what to do about the classroom problems they have isolated. Such teachers might have a macrolevel understanding of the problems of schooling in a diverse society but would possess few skills for making teaching more responsive. Thus, they might fall back either on practices of others at their school site or on memories of their own experiences in school.

In the Teacher Education Program at UCSD, we have found that strategies which support home-school connections need to be developed at all levels of teacher preparation. Students in precredential, credential, and master's degree programs all benefit from activities in which they can learn first how to find out about students' lives outside school; then how to communicate effectively with students' families; and, finally, how to collaborate with students and their families in creating effective learning activities. Beginning teachers find the activities involved in making home-

school connections highly challenging. Sometimes, colleagues at the school site do not support beginning teachers' efforts to involve families. Yet those who succeed in making links to students' homes are extraordinarily rewarded. This valued outcome encourages us to support teachers, both beginning and experienced, in making home-school connections.

## References

- Bruer, J. (1993). The mind's journey from novice to expert. *American Educator*, 17 (2), 6-15; 38-45.
- Bruner, J. (1978). The role of dialogue in language acquisition. In A. Sinclair, R. J. Jarvella, & W. J. M. Levelt (Eds.), *The child's conception of language*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Collins, A., Brown, J. S., & Hollum, A. (1991). Cognitive apprenticeship: Making thinking visible. *American Educator*, 15 (3), 6-11; 38-46.
- Eck, E. (1993). Math to go: A K-6 curriculum linking home and school. Unpublished M.A. thesis. Teacher Education Program, University of California, San Diego. [Videotaped version available from author.]
- Katz, L. G. (1993). All about me. *American Educator*, 17 (2), 18-23.
- Leinhardt, G. (1992). What research on learning tells us about teaching. *Educational Leadership*, 50, 20-25.
- Moll, L. (1992). Bilingual classroom studies and community analysis: Some recent trends. *Educational Researcher*, 21 (2), 20-24.
- Schack, G. (1993). Involving students in authentic research. *Educational Leadership*, 50 (7), 29-31.
- Weston, N. (1992). The home-school library: Improving the educational success of students through family involvement. Unpublished M.A. thesis. Teacher Education Program, University of California, San Diego. [Videotaped version available from author.]



# Family Involvement in Education: The Apprehensions of Student Teachers

**Peg Hartmann Winkelman**  
University of California, Berkeley

**Arming student teachers with skills to face the situations that most often cause them anxiety is one way to promote confidence and help them overcome their fears.**

**A**LTHOUGH I HAVE been interested and engaged in family involvement over the past 12 years, I am embarrassed to admit that I still underestimate the complexity of the relationship between teachers and families. Collaborating with parents is sometimes a difficult and even frightening challenge for teachers. Teacher educators must help prepare student teachers for this challenge by sensitizing them to the diverse populations they will serve and the barriers that can make collaboration difficult for some families. At the same time we must be equally ready to deal

with the possibility that student teachers may themselves possess attitudes and apprehensions that pose problems for them as they attempt to connect with families.

My own thinking about what constitutes good teacher preparation for family involvement has undergone a number of changes over a period of years during which I was first a teacher, then an administrator, and now a teacher educator. In this chapter I will attempt to convey what I have recently concluded about student teachers grappling with the issues of family involvement in a multiple-subject credential program at the University of California, Berkeley.

## A Confidence-Shaking Incident

A few years ago I was comfortable with the way I was teaching students about family involvement. Given both the demands and the limited duration of credential programs, I felt that I was covering the topic as thoroughly and thoughtfully as time allowed. As a lecturer and supervisor, I had attempted to weave appropriate parent involvement themes into four elements of a multiple-subject credential program: fieldwork, a general topics course, a social science methods class, and a supervision seminar ("supe" groups).

But one incident made me rethink my approach to this topic.

### About the Author

**Peg Hartmann Winkelman** obtained a master's degree in Education Math, Science, and Technology and a Ph.D. in Educational Administration from UC Berkeley. She has instructed and supervised student teachers at UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Education and taught at the junior high and elementary school levels. Peg currently acts as vice principal at an elementary school in Vallejo, California, and teaches a course at Mills College on educator communication with families.

One afternoon a normally calm, reserved student teacher, looking nervous and jittery, walked into our supervision seminar. As usual, I began our discussion with the question, "What happened this week?" Pamela quickly announced, "Something just happened today at school, and I am still really upset about the whole incident." The group looked at her, and several students simultaneously suggested that she talk first.

Pamela described a child in her placement class who had been repeatedly challenging her and her master teacher. They had both tried different ways of working with this student. Finally, Pamela's master teacher wrote

**The reactions of my student teachers to this incident matched neither their previous discussions about the purposes of family involvement nor the attitudes they had exhibited.**

a note to the child's mother, stating that she would be calling the mother that night. When the call was made, the mother yelled at the teacher and hung up the phone. The next morning the mother came into the classroom, screaming that she did not want to be disturbed at home and complaining that her daughter had been treated unfairly. After lengthy discussions involving the mother, the principal, the teacher, and Pamela, the problem was resolved. The mother even apologized for becoming so angry. Pamela felt that all four of them had ended with a better understanding of the situation, yet she was "still shaking."

After describing the incident, Pamela asked the seminar group, "What would have happened if the principal had not been supportive or had taken the parent's side?" Visibly upset by Pamela's experience, the other student teachers asked questions, such as, "Does this mean we should never call a parent at home?" and "What could the teacher have possibly done differently?" During the discussion my students made statements that were equally unsettling to me, such as, "That is why you should handle discipline at school and not bother with the parents."

Throughout the class period the student teachers appeared to be expecting me to provide the answer to this conflict. I did my best to question and listen to their concerns, but I was shocked that a single reported incident could apparently weaken their commitment to involving families in the educational process of their children. At the end of this discussion, I asked my students to think about other family involvement experiences, questions, or concerns they might share with the group in future sessions.

I walked away from the seminar sensing that something important had occurred but also feeling confused by the group's response to Pamela's experience. The reactions of my student teachers to this incident matched neither their previous discussions about the purposes of family involvement nor the attitudes they had exhibited in carrying out assignments designed to build their skills in connecting with families. For example, in a class session focused on parent conferences, several difficult interactions with

**This incident suggested that it might take very little to upset the well-intentioned plans that new teachers have for family involvement.**

parents had been role-played. Although students had found handling these modeled situations difficult, most had reported gaining confidence about their ability to work through such issues with families. They had also been very positive about the usefulness of such fieldwork assignments as writing news notes to families, phoning or visiting homes, and attending parent-teacher conferences. Most had resolved to conduct more outreach with parents than they had witnessed in their placements. Some had spoken quite passionately about their concerns regarding the exclusion of many families from the educational process.

I knew from my experience as a teacher and administrator that negative interactions with families would occur not just once for these teachers but, perhaps, many times during their careers. With so many educational decisions being made every day in a classroom, not even two adults (much less 50) would agree all of the time. Still, the fact that a single *reported* confrontation with parents could weaken their resolve to collaborate deeply troubled me. I asked myself what would happen when a disagreement or misunderstanding confronted these new teachers *personally*. Would they close their doors (and their minds) to avoid conflict and keep families at a safe distance? This incident suggested that it might take very little to upset the well-intentioned plans that new teachers have for family involvement.

After more reflection I decided that my students' desire to work closely with families was still strong. However, these bright, hard-working, and committed prospective teachers had genuine fears about the challenges that collaboration with families might present. To prepare my students better for this aspect of teaching, I had to prepare myself better. I had encouraged my students to examine the perspectives of parents yet had failed to consider fully their ambivalent feelings concerning family involvement. I needed to learn more about the concerns and fears of beginning teachers related to working with families. I would also have to devote more time to helping the teachers reflect on personal experiences in their field placements. Finally, I could not expect that revealing experi-



ences would occur opportunistically during student teaching but would have to create situations in which unacknowledged concerns could be brought into the open and dealt with productively.

## Uncovering the Apprehensions of Student Teachers

In my methods course in social science, I decided to use a new strategy to elicit the latent apprehensions of teachers to involving families in matters affecting the curriculum. I introduced a case written by another teacher educator, Barbara Levin, that was based on the experience of a beginning teacher (see the Appendix). In this incident a teacher (Liz Hobard) is first surprised and then taken aback when a mother (Mrs. White) challenges the inclusion of the Chinese New Year as a subject in the curriculum. When the mother goes on to challenge much of the social studies content and teaching practices in the class, the teacher finds herself growing more and more defensive. The mother eventually threatens to go to the principal to protest Ms. Hobard's teaching decisions.

### Use of Case Examples for Student Discussion

After I had presented the case, the student teachers broke into small groups and eagerly brainstormed the facts and issues it raised for them, discussing what they would have done in Liz's situation. Some suggested that they would try to be less defensive; others, that they would enlist the support of the principal; and still others, that they would try to determine whether the mother's concern involved broader issues than had emerged in this discussion. They advocated having Liz think about whether Mrs. White's criticisms of her curriculum had some merit and proposed talking to colleagues as well as to other parents to broaden their perspective of the situation. Finally, they suggested that Liz should write a family newsletter describing her curriculum goals, objectives, and rationale.

In the midst of these sensible suggestions, a student teacher said that if she had been Liz in this difficult situation, she would have cried. The break in the discussion occasioned by this refresh-

**In the midst of these sensible suggestions, a student teacher said that if she had been Liz . . . , she would have cried.**

ingly honest response allowed me the opportunity to ask my student teachers, "What are your personal concerns about working closely with families in your own classroom next year?" Several students spoke at once. We listened to a few responses, and then I requested written comments from everyone. Students began writing immediately and continued to work until the end of the class period.

In thinking again about this sequence of events, I guess that it was not merely the case presentation that stirred reflection. The personal perspectives and honest responses of a few student teachers helped the others delve into their own feelings about family involvement. In particular, the response "I would cry" opened the door to the expression of emotions ordinarily suppressed in academic or professional discussions. It also presented me with a teaching opportunity I knew I must pursue.

### **Use of Students' Reflections and Comments**

During the next semester I decided to use one of the responses to my questions about students' fears related to family involvement to reinitiate and continue the previous discussion. I started off one supervision seminar group session by sharing the following "nightmare," contributed by a student named Leah:

**In this moment of shared vulnerability, I more fully understood the missing link in my approach to teaching family involvement to preservice teachers.**

A parent comes in and says she thinks I am an incompetent teacher, that her kid isn't learning anything, and that she is going to complain to the principal about me. In fact, several parents agree and are all going to the principal.

My reading of this comment was met with nods and nervous laughter. No one needed to look around the room, for it could have been written by anyone in the class. In this moment of shared vulnerability, I more fully understood the missing link in my approach to teaching family involvement to preservice teachers. With the exception of the incident Pamela shared and the social science case I provided, our previous class sessions had focused mainly on the barriers families face in their interactions with the educational system. Although these issues were important and the

**Soon my students recognized that they all had anxieties about working with families.**

sharing of ideas was fruitful, in many ways they had been merely academic exercises. As one student teacher responded to Leah's comment, "Now we are getting real!"

Throughout the rest of the semester, I shared other student teachers' responses to my questions about fears regarding family involvement. Soon my students recognized that they all had anxieties about working with families. They rarely requested anonymity for their responses and often offered to read their own comments. In their student-teaching journals, they not only described family involvement possibilities but also posed provocative questions and provided possible responses. Through journal writing, role-playing, and seminar discussions, I learned that all of my student teachers had various apprehensions about working with the families of their students.

## **Analysis of Concerns About Family Involvement**

Most of the concerns my students have shared about involving parents in their children's education can be grouped in a small number of categories. Their anxieties amount to worrying about four general questions: (1) How do I defend my curriculum and teaching practices? (2) How can I involve *all* families in the education of their children? (3) How much family participation do I really want in my classroom? and (4) How do I communicate with parents about children's problems and weaknesses? I turn now to a more detailed examination of those apprehensions.

### **Explaining Curriculum and Pedagogical Decisions**

In every conversation my students and I have had about family involvement, they have raised the issue of having to defend the content and instructional approach in different curriculum areas. Student teachers worried that their methods might be unfamiliar or controversial and that, because they were new teachers, parents might conclude that these procedures were the result of inexperience. They asked questions about how to prove to parents that hands-on activities and cooperative problem solving promote

**Student teachers seemed to be starting off their careers assuming that families would not trust, support, or understand their teaching decisions.**

important learning objectives. In communicating with families, they wanted to avoid using phrases such as “research shows.” But few believed that their own words would convince families about the effectiveness of the methods. Commented one student:

If they [families] don't understand something like the point of using manipulatives in math, they can be critical without trying to explore or understand a teacher's goals.

Student teachers seemed to be starting off their careers assuming that families would not trust, support, or understand their teaching decisions. Most of all, they seemed to fear confrontation with families in which they would be challenged to explain their rationale about curriculum. Although they had researched, discussed, and written about their teaching philosophies in all their preservice courses, they were uncertain about their ability to communicate those ideas to parents.

In addition to these concerns about the acceptability of modern instructional approaches, many student teachers felt that families would object to the particular multicultural content included in the curriculum. They wanted to give students “a balanced view of our country” but were afraid that families might misjudge or simply disagree with their intentions. One student shared this apprehension:

I wonder how my ethnic background as a Chinese will affect the parents' view of my perspective in teaching Chinese New Year. I wonder if parents would support me or would see me “pushing” Chinese culture down at their children?

In the class discussion of the multicultural case summarized earlier, my student teachers resolved many of these issues for Liz; yet in subsequent discussions, journal writing, and interviews, they continued to raise questions about incorporating multicultural content into their own classroom curriculum. A student teacher declared that the increased cultural sensitivity that she and other student teachers had acquired as part of this teacher education program made her feel as though she must constantly “walk on eggshells” when working with students' families.

**A recurring theme was the pressure student teachers felt to “be everything to every parent.”**

A recurring theme was the pressure student teachers felt to “be everything to every parent.” Some student teachers worried that less-educated parents might view them as university outsiders who had little understanding of what was best for their children. Other student teachers reported that highly educated parents frequently needed to be reassured that the curriculum was challenging enough for their children.

Some student teachers proposed a simple antidote for the anxiety they felt about defending their curriculum and instruction:

A lot of teachers send homework home with kids that reflects the more traditional values in education. They may have been planning to do this stuff anyway, but they choose to keep it for homework, saving class time for more fun stuff and letting parents see what they want to see (what they are used to).

I was surprised that most of the student teachers approved of this simple solution. The thought of not having to defend their classroom practices made them willing to overlook the fact that this homework proposal contradicted their stated goals for clear and open communication with students’ families.

I asked, “How does ‘traditional homework’ help children make connections between what they are learning in your classroom and what they are doing with their families at home?” Then I allowed time for my student teachers to ponder that question. After further discussion the student teachers decided that, ideally, homework should promote two-way communication between families and teachers. They agreed that children should have opportunities to bring things from home to shape the classroom curriculum (e.g., sharing family traditions as part of a social science unit) and that children should take home assignments that accurately represent what is going on in the classroom.

I wanted student teachers to expand their perceptions about homework and to try a variety of strategies that might work for them. I described how as a teacher I had been surprised by the number of low-income families that checked out videos of our classroom activities. Student teachers became very excited about

**Student teachers thus began to consider the benefits and not just the burdens of homework.**

the idea of videotaping classroom activities and brainstormed many extension activities to accompany the classroom videos, such as bookmaking, propmaking, and production of packets of hands-on materials. We discussed other strategies that might help parents better understand their teaching goals and methods and provide the basis for further dialogue about the learning that occurs in the home.

A student teacher shared an activity being carried on in her classroom that exemplified what could be gained from a richer type of homework assignment. Every child was given an opportunity to take a "bear bag" home at least once during the school year. The bag contained a teddy bear and a travel journal. Each family made a journal entry and contributed pictures, letters, or mementos to represent the bear's adventures in their home. Later, children told the class about the bear's stay at their home and passed the bear bag to another child. Student teachers who had previously thought of the bear bag only as a cute language-development activity now appreciated the way it fostered a sense of community in the classroom and with families. Student teachers thus began to consider the benefits and not just the burdens of homework.

### **Involving All Families**

My greatest concern with parent involvement is how to get uninvolved parents involved, especially when their child is struggling in school. What can I do when parents don't show up to conferences, don't return calls, and generally make themselves unavailable? I'm thinking of a child whose mom only gets her to school once or twice a week on average. Do I have to let go of that parent? What about the impact on the child? Is there anything I can do without the parent to make a real difference for this student when she is one of 30?

Many students such as this one described the lack of family involvement as a serious problem. They indicated feeling frustrated and unsupported when they did not receive responses to their efforts (and those of their master teachers) to involve families. They often took it very personally when they were unable to make a connection with a family. Another student teacher stated:

I can teach so much more effectively if parents are involved and understand what I want to do with the class. . . . If I know I can call the parent of a child who is disruptive and get their support, my job as a teacher becomes a little bit easier. I'm in a student teaching situation in which very few of the parents are involved. The children are very disruptive in the classroom, and I have no support from the parents! I need to feel that the parents and I are a team made to help the child be the best student he/she can be.

These student teachers described situations in which the uninvolved families usually included students who were having problems in school. They observed that teachers often find it hard to contact the families they feel they most *need* to reach. Yet my students failed to realize how difficult it would be to build a team if the family-teacher relationship began with bad news. They did not always recognize that families might want to avoid hearing more about their failures. Typically, uninvolved families are already experiencing more stress than they can effectively manage.

In an attempt to get my student teachers to follow up this insight about a possible reason for uninvolved families, I posed the question, "How can teachers involve families in a positive way *before* problems occur in the classroom?" Several student teachers suggested starting the school year with positive phone calls and notes to children's families. Most hoped to establish good rapport before the official parent conference week. Some wanted to visit each child's home. I shared the weekly home-school dialogue sheets that I used as a classroom teacher, and we talked about how to design communication strategies to be both effective *and* manageable. We concluded that no single approach would work and that they would need to use a variety of methods and tactics. I suggested another thought for them to consider. Just as they would not think of giving up on a child after one teaching attempt, they should not conclude that families were incapable of being involved if they failed to respond after one or even several overtures.

**We concluded that no single approach would work and that they would need to use a variety of methods and tactics.**

### **Structuring Family Participation in the Classroom**

Although student teachers expressed a desire to involve all families, many raised the question, "Are parent volunteers a bless-



ing or a curse?" This question was directly related to the issue of defending their teaching decisions. Student teachers wanted families to be involved in their children's education, and they knew that having another adult in the classroom might be valuable in providing children with more individual attention. However, "... having parents in the classroom opens you to more criticism since parents are able to view the curricular program up close and personal."

Many student teachers felt that they would not be ready to have regular volunteers in the classroom during their first year of teaching because they knew they would be constantly revising their teaching methods, management practices, and curriculum plans during those initial months. They suggested that they needed to have it all together for any adult who might observe them in action, despite the fact they had previously talked about their own development as a teacher being long-term and continual. One student teacher commented:

As a first year teacher, I imagine doing a lot of adjustment mid-stride. I don't know if I will be ready to plan for regular volunteers in my classroom. I think I would feel uneasy if I were unprepared and a parent came in asking what to do.

Although student teachers reported that family volunteers improved the instructional program that their master teachers were able to provide, they also noted instances in which that experience was negative. They observed that volunteers sometimes provided discipline or a type of assistance that was inconsistent with the teachers' classroom goals or instructional philosophy (e.g., doing a student's work).

Student teachers were unclear about how they might handle adults who did not meet their expectations for assisting in the classroom or who might be critical of their instructional practices. Thus, many were tempted to invite family volunteers into their classrooms only on a limited basis (e.g., to give assistance in videotaping well-practiced performances). A fear of confrontation made them blind to the possibility that inviting families into the classroom could provide opportunities to clarify the nature of their

**Student teachers were unclear about how they might handle adults who did not meet their expectations . . . or who might be critical.**

**We need to expose student teachers to more success stories relating to the use of family volunteers in the classroom.**

curriculum using a truly hands-on approach. Many student teachers failed to consider the idea that they would have many chances to engage in meaningful conversations about management and instructional approaches if parents volunteered regularly in the classroom. Certainly, the farthest thing from the minds of most of my student teachers was the notion that such interactions might be mutually beneficial—that they might gain not only support but valuable insights and knowledge from family volunteers. Although we role-played and discussed potential scenarios for the use of volunteers, student teachers still envisioned fairly limited roles for parents in their classrooms.

For these inexperienced teachers the potential risks of family participation in the classroom seemed to outweigh the benefits. It may be that, with increased experience and confidence, they can focus more on potential positive outcomes. It may also be that, to counteract this negative focus, we need to expose student teachers to more success stories relating to the use of family volunteers in the classroom.

### **Discussing Children's Weaknesses**

As a group student teachers could not decide whether they were more afraid of possible confrontations with family volunteers in a classroom or the charged discussions they anticipated would occur during conferences about children having problems in school. One student teacher expressed her feelings this way:

The most difficult thing for me, I think, will be to tell a parent that their child isn't doing well in my class—either academically, emotionally, or behaviorally. No parent wants to hear that their child isn't perfect. Who would? I think it will take practice to deal with this situation with finesse. Unfortunately, it's not a situation I'll be able to avoid (unless I have a perfect class).

Student teachers recognized that not every interaction with students' families could be completely pleasant and conflict-free. They understood that teachers have a responsibility to convey bad news as well as good news about students' social and academic

development. However, student teachers rarely considered the fear that parents might have of being judged by a teacher. Many student teachers expressed not only apprehension but a sense of powerlessness in connection with explosive situations. This anxiety may have been based on events that they had witnessed or experienced in schools. One student teacher offered the following example:

While subbing, I was cussed out by a mother because I kept her child five minutes after school. I felt demoralized and intimidated.

**Student teachers indicated that they needed opportunities to discuss and work through negative interactions.**

Student teachers indicated that they needed opportunities to discuss and work through negative interactions. They also wanted support in problem-solving or brainstorming approaches to potentially difficult situations. I encouraged them to work with their fellow student teachers as well as their master teachers so they would feel thoroughly prepared for contacts with families, such as in parent conferences. Student teachers frequently approached these conferences with a good deal of apprehension. One student teacher stated:

I have a parent meeting tomorrow (with a mother) regarding a grade her son received from me. This kid has been a behavior problem in the past and currently has been very difficult with me. His mother called my teacher minutes after her son got home with some work he had done for me which I gave a "C" grade to. He had already made three scenes in class about this grade, including yelling at me. So his mother wants a meeting to "avert a war." I am hopeful that our conference will be an opportunity to make solutions with her support. I am afraid she will blame me and use this opportunity to "discipline" me. I don't know how it will go; but at any rate it will be enlightening and, I sincerely hope, fruitful.

Student teachers often used the word *hope* in describing family encounters. They seemed to believe that they had little control over the outcome of such meetings. Many student teachers who had only recently graduated from college said they felt unequal to parents because they had only just begun to see themselves as adult authority figures. A feeling of intimidation often prevented them from considering the possibility of learning from or together with the families of their students.

**Helping student teachers think through the consequences of *not* communicating with families can sometimes motivate the . . . search for a better solution.**

Blame seemed to be another obstacle that interfered with student teachers' communication about children's problems. Many student teachers did not want to be blamed for a child's difficulties yet seemed oblivious to the tendency of parents to feel responsible for their children's problems in school. Fearing the repercussions of calling home or contacting children's families in other ways, some student teachers (following the model of some experienced teachers) proposed handling all discipline problems within the classroom to avoid confrontations, as noted previously. They failed to consider the message this sends to students and their families. When teachers do not contact parents about a child's difficulties and enlist the family's participation in the effort to find a solution, the parents may assume that the teacher does, in fact, consider them to be part of the problem or at least that they are not capable of helping to resolve the situation. This type of negative message, even if unspoken, ends up causing resentment and defensiveness and sometimes leads to the very type of confrontation teachers initially wanted to avoid. Helping student teachers think through the consequences of *not* communicating with families can sometimes motivate the student teacher to search for a better solution.

## **A Sticky Web of Adult Defenses**

The implicit assumption buried within all the questions and issues raised by my students was that teachers must beware of families. Student teachers' fears, intricately interconnected, reinforced one another. Their apprehensions gained strength from the stories of confrontation told by other teachers and made them more apt to read implied criticism into innocent parent comments or questions. I was concerned that my students would fail to see that children become the victims when adults' anxieties lead them to weave a sticky web of defenses. Therefore, I tried sharing the following scenario with my latest class of student teachers to help them consider the consequences of hesitating to collaborate with families or of failing to think about unspoken messages, insensitive advice, and defensive responses.

A teacher who wanted to avoid having to defend her innovative curriculum sent home very traditional homework and solicited the minimum amount of family participation required by the school. A grandmother who wanted to help out at home and in the classroom offered her assistance and was told by this teacher that there was no need for her to help out in the classroom and that her grandson was doing fine. The teacher quickly concluded this conversation by promising that they could talk more at conference time.

The grandmother came early for the conference, explaining that her daughter (a single parent) had to work late. However, she promised to take copious notes and share them with her daughter. The teacher smiled and replied that there was really nothing to worry about; her grandson was doing well in all academic areas. The teacher showed the grandmother the boy's test scores and report card. The grandmother was relieved but was still eager to support her grandson in any possible way. "Is there anything I can help him work on?" she asked.

The teacher thought for a moment and then responded, "He sometimes seems sleepy. Perhaps he waits up for his mother too often and needs to go to bed earlier. He also likes to get attention from the other boys in the room, which is sometimes distracting. Are there any male role models in his life?" The grandmother interpreted this remark as a criticism of the parenting that she and her daughter had worked so hard to provide for her grandson. She knew nothing about this teacher or what went on in her grandson's classroom, so she grasped for reassuring evidence of her grandson's competence. She quickly retorted, "He whizzes through the homework you send home. Looking at his grades and test scores, I'd say he is just bored in your classroom. You probably aren't doing anything which interests him."

The rest of the conference soon deteriorated into accusations and defensive remarks. The teacher's worst fears were confirmed, as the conference ended with the grandmother declaring, "I will have to speak to the principal about transferring my grandson into another classroom with a more challenging curriculum."

Although I did not expect that the presentation of this scenario would, by itself, change the way my student teachers viewed the risks of collaborating with families, I did hope that it would set the stage for them to think in a more mature way about the complexity of negative parent interactions. I wanted this description to provide

**Dealing with the families of children in their class is not an option or a choice but an intrinsic part of teaching.**

a concrete reference point that student teachers could use to step back from reports of similar unpleasant incidents and think about reasons for the responses of each of the participants.

In addition, I have tried to help student teachers realize that they must reconcile themselves to the reality that family involvement is neither a wholly positive nor an entirely negative proposition. In the end they also need to realize that dealing with the families of children in their class is not an option or a choice but an intrinsic part of teaching. Teachers can plan for and nurture productive partnerships with children's families or react to situations as they arise. In the end teachers have more power to promote positive outcomes if they choose to initiate family involvement activities.

Similarly, teacher-preparation programs can either hope that their graduates will learn the attitudes, knowledge, and skills they will need to work productively with families *on the job* or they can address this part of professional development head-on. Given the evidence we have that most teachers do not acquire this expertise naturally, neglect of this area of teacher preparation is also not really an option.

## **A Framework for Responding to the Concerns of Student Teachers**

Encouraging student teachers to share their concerns about family involvement in education opens a Pandora's box. Some of the issues these prospective educators raise can and should be addressed within the context of required courses and fieldwork assignments. Other questions and concerns are not so easily answered.

### **Family Involvement Issues in Methods Courses**

In all courses student teachers should be expected to describe their emerging teaching philosophies and understandings about children and learning in terms easily comprehended by parents. In methods classes student teachers should work cooperatively on:

- Answering difficult questions about curriculum and instruction
- Writing family news notes describing classroom activities, using understandable language
- Designing appropriate home activities
- Conducting hands-on demonstrations of classroom activities that might involve families and increase their participation
- Developing portfolio assessments that would clearly illustrate to families what their children are learning

Practice with these types of projects not only prepares student teachers better to work with families but also forces student teachers to examine and personally reconstruct their theoretical understandings. Arming student teachers with skills to face the situations that most often cause them anxiety is one way to promote confidence and help them overcome their fears.

### **Integration of Family Involvement Issues in Field Placements**

The issues of managing parent volunteers, handling parent confrontations, and helping uninvolved parents find a way of participating are not easily addressed in the content of a typical teacher education course. No inspiring lecture, series of workshops, or two-unit course will adequately prepare student teachers for all the challenges they will face when working with families in the schools. It is essential, therefore, to structure field assignments to include such activities as conducting community research, writing report cards and letters home, developing home activities, and participating in back-to-school nights, family events, and conferences. Although such assignments are necessary, they probably will not be sufficient to help student teachers translate theory into practice. Student teachers must also be provided with built-in time to reflect on family involvement experiences and need to be encouraged to develop approaches that employ their own interests and capabilities.



### Family Involvement Issues in Student Teaching Seminars

My student teachers believe it is important to consider issues of family involvement continually. They suggest that they need multiple opportunities to try addressing such questions as the following: How might you explain this developmental stage to your student's grandmother? Can you describe the benefits of this instructional approach to a parent? What can families do at home to continue, extend, or initiate this learning? What can you learn about a child from his or her family? or How can you use what you have learned about this community to make a stronger connection between the home and the school?

**Knowing why it is difficult to make home-school connections is different from knowing how to improve these connections.**

Courses on cultural diversity and urban education often raise more questions for student teachers than can be addressed. Knowing why it is difficult to make home-school connections is different from knowing how to improve these connections. In student-teaching seminars student teachers need to be presented with many examples of successful and unsuccessful interactions among teachers and families so that they will have a chance to develop a repertoire of strategies and a sense of how to select among these strategies in particular situations. Role-playing and problem solving with peers may allow student teachers to examine their concerns in safe and supportive environments. But student teachers also need hands-on experience in their classrooms.

Another way to make student teachers more confident about their ability to form partnerships with parents is to show the student teachers ways in which their knowledge about teaching can be applied to working with parents. For example, student teachers know that helping children learn involves providing needed information, structuring opportunities for the development and application of that information, and then acknowledging the accomplishment. Building a partnership with parents requires the same type of provision of opportunities and positive feedback (e.g., "Michael has been more confident in reading out loud in class. Have you been working with him at home?"). Just as children perform best in classrooms in which teachers value their individual talents and

celebrate their successes, parents (and teachers) do best when their abilities and contributions are recognized and appreciated.

Student teachers can be urged to apply what they know about modalities of learning in children to the topic of communicating with parents. Like children, parents have preferred ways in which they receive information. Some parents respond best to face-to-face interactions or personal telephone conversations; others may favor frequent but short written notes; and still others react positively to hands-on experiences in the classroom or in home learning activities. Student teachers might be asked to think through how they could apply their knowledge of different ways of learning to inform families about certain topics. The topics might range from the content of the curriculum or the ways in which children are learning to solve problems collaboratively to the progress in learning that individual children are making.

## Developing Capacity for Partnerships: A Challenge

As teacher educators we need to recognize that there is not just one successful model for family involvement in education. Because families can be involved in education in many different ways, student teachers need opportunities to hear about, witness, and discuss varied approaches and then develop strategies for working with families.

**Our goal must be to develop an integrated approach to examining family-school partnership issues.**

If we want student teachers to develop partnerships with families, we must be willing to engage in partnerships with our student teachers. We must not trivialize their concerns or pretend that involving families is always positive or pleasant. We must not underestimate the complexity of family involvement. Our goal must be to develop an integrated approach to examining family-school partnership issues throughout our teacher education programs. Finally, if we expect student teachers to be open to the concerns and insights of families, we must ourselves learn to profit from the words and experiences of our student teachers.

## Appendix

### Barbara Levin's Case

Liz Hobard could not believe what she was hearing from the parent of one of her favorite second graders at Hilltop School in Foothill, California. This was a very affluent suburban school district with very well-educated, professional parents; and this was the 1990s. Ms. Hobard had been teaching for only three years, but she felt that she had developed a good second-grade curriculum and thought she understood these children's learning needs well. However, she wasn't quite sure what to think about this new issue or how to respond to this irate parent who had come to talk with her after school one day in early February. The parent, Mrs. White, was a regular volunteer on field trips and other classroom events, and she wasn't one of those overly critical parents who complain all the time.

"I really am concerned about the diffusion of western European culture in the teaching that is going on this class," said Mrs. White. "I come to school and all I see are these pictures of Martin Luther King up in the classrooms. What ever happened to pictures of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington?"

"Oh, of course, we will be studying all the presidents around the time of Presidents' Day. And you know February is designated as Black History Month," replied Ms. Hobard.

"Well, the other thing that is bothering me is this emphasis on Chinese New Year. When I was in school, we never celebrated Chinese New Year. We spent hours at home making that dragon mask for the Chinese New Year parade, and I just think too much class time has been taken up with that kind of stuff this year. What ever happened to celebrating American holidays?" asked Mrs. White.

"Well, you know about 25 percent of the children in our school are Asian, and most of them are of Chinese descent. We want to involve all the children of Hilltop School, and we do study the cultural heritage of the children in our classroom. Do you remember the large world map and the heritage dolls we did at the beginning of the school year? This is a follow-up to that activity. We'll be studying about the Irish in March and other ethnic groups in April and May. And we did have Halloween at school last fall and both Hanukkah and Christmas celebrations," responded Ms. Hobard, starting to feel a little defensive.

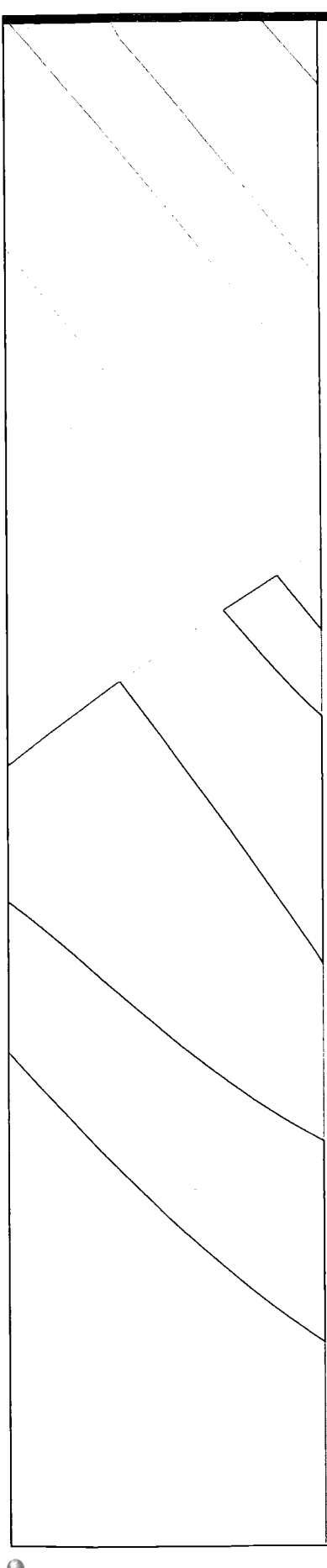
"I just want you to know what my friends and I think about all of this. Have you read this article from the *Wall Street Journal* about the diffusion of American culture in our schools? We think there is a lot of truth to this, and we want to know what you are going to do about it?" threatened Mrs. White in a voice that was getting louder and louder each time she spoke.

"Can I see a copy of that article? Mmmm. Let me see. Well, I can see what prompted some of your concern. But let me assure you that the second-grade social studies curriculum in the Foothill School District emphasizes the study of the family and the contributions of different cultures to our society. We use occasions such as Martin Luther King's birthday to study about our country's past. And we use Chinese New Year as an opportunity to learn about the customs of many of the children in our school," replied Ms. Hobard as she wondered if this parent really represented the feelings of a lot of parents at Hilltop or only a vocal minority.

"Well, I'm going to have a talk with the principal, and we'll just see about this second-grade curriculum!" barked Mrs. White as she strode out of the room.

"Of course, that is your right. But I'm sure the principal is well aware of our curriculum, and the Chinese New Year parade was an all-school event, not just for the second grade," replied Ms. Hobard to the back of a retreating Mrs. White.

"Wow!" thought Ms. Hobard to herself. "I'm exhausted! I wonder what prompted all that? I don't think we spend too much time on Chinese New Year. It was fun, the kids learned a lot, and they liked the activities. I guess I'd better plan a little more for Presidents' Day. However, I think I'll have the kids make little booklets about Lincoln and Washington. They can cut out their profiles and write some stories about them. We can send the booklets home so that parents are sure to see what we did in class. I sure hope my principal backs me up on this one. I wonder what all this means? Will it lead to a big hullabaloo about our social studies curriculum? Am I going to hear about this from other parents too?"



# Preparing Educational Leaders to Work Effectively with Families: The Parent Power Project

**Deanna Evans-Schilling**  
California State University, Fresno

**The most important thing I can do for families is to prepare educators . . . with the experience, confidence, materials, and willingness to initiate family involvement projects of their own.**

**I** RECENTLY CAME ACROSS a quotation attributed to William Butler Yeats: "Education is not the filling of a bucket but the lighting of a fire." I cut the quotation out of the newspaper and put it on the bulletin board above my desk. I don't think I would have done so when I first began teaching at the university level 17 years ago, probably because I was too busy filling buckets—my own and my students'.

I suspect that many of us start our professional lives in much the same way—as products of a bucket-filling educational model. Moving from this model to the one envisioned by Yeats has been,

for me, a developmental process—a series of journeys. The journey that has involved the preparation of preservice and in-service teachers and other school personnel to work sensitively and effectively with families has been the most rewarding journey of all.

This paper describes the Parent Power Project—how it got started, how it works, and where it is headed next. The intent is not to provide a blueprint, since every situation is different. Rather, it is to provide some suggestions on getting started for those interested in developing field-based models to train school personnel to work with families. I will also include some observations about the process of curriculum innovation itself.

## Establishing the Parent Power Project

In April, 1992, I was notified that the Parent Power Project I founded in 1985 and have directed since then had received the Christa McAuliffe Showcase of Excellence Award in the category titled Innovative Curricula in

Teacher Preparation Programs. What leads to curricular innovation? In the case of the Parent Power Project—sheer frustration (Evans-Schilling, 1992a). I was frustrated about teaching a course in which students could talk about families whose children have learning problems, but had no way to work with those children. And I was also frustrated because I had no way to serve families who contacted me to seek help for their children who were struggling in school. (In 1985 as in 1997 there were few community resources to which families could be referred, and what existed was beyond the financial reach of most.) Out of these twin frustrations, the Parent Power Project was born.

### About the Author

**Deanna Evans-Schilling** is a professor in the Department of Counseling and Special Education at California State University, Fresno. Her interests center on home-school involvement, motivation in the classroom, and the social and emotional needs of teachers and students. In 1994 she was the first recipient of the Provost's Excellence in Teaching award at CSU, Fresno. She continues to direct the Parent Power Project as well as teach a course on family involvement for bilingual special educators.

### **Preparing for the Journey: Necessary First Steps**

To get Parent Power under way, I had to find a location, institutionalize the project, make decisions about financing basic operations, recruit students to be project teachers, and recruit families. Because the university lacked adequate room, a local school district was approached to meet this need. The district has generously provided space and minor support services for the past 11 years.

I thought it was very important to institutionalize the project from the beginning. Over the years there have been attempts at various universities to mount similar projects. However, when such projects are funded by grants, they tend to die once the grants end. In an effort to prevent a similar outcome, the project was conceptualized and implemented as a graduate-level course. The formal title of the course is Clinical and Field Experience with Families and Schools. Approval was recently obtained to change the course from a "topics" designation to a permanent course offering listed in the campus catalog.

Since the beginning the only funding received by the project has come from a one-time fee (currently \$25) paid by each family. The fee is waived for families who cannot afford to pay it. This money has been used primarily to build the parent lending library and the graduate student professional reference library and to cover some printing and mailing costs. I have deliberately *not* sought additional funds because, again, I did not want the project to become dependent on external funding. A major side benefit of this strategy is that it has forced us to keep the materials and teaching techniques we use with families simple and realistic.

University students may enroll in the course only with permission of the instructor. These students are deliberately drawn from a variety of backgrounds and fields (including elementary and secondary education, special education, counseling, and administration) so that the course becomes an interdisciplinary experience. In addition, students are chosen to reflect different career stages—from those just beginning teacher credential (or other) programs to



**The intent is to nurture future leaders and provide a mentoring experience for those farther along on their career paths.**

those with many years of professional experience. The intent is to nurture future leaders and provide a mentoring experience for those farther along on their career paths.

Other criteria for selection as a project teacher include a strong academic record and faculty recommendations. An oral interview is used to evaluate a candidate's commitment to working with families and prior experience with children or parents. Because we serve a diverse group of families, diversity among our teachers is also sought (for example, in ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, gender, and experience in a rural rather than in an urban work setting).

The supervisory demands of a clinical course require a small class size—11 graduate students each semester. (It is worth noting that over 1,100 students in our School of Education received credentials last year with little or no specific instruction in working with families. To begin to address this need, a new course, based on the project model but allowing for a larger class size, was initiated in the 1994-95 academic year.)

The recruiting of families to take part in the project has been accomplished primarily through parents contacting me. Sometimes they call the School of Education seeking help and are referred to me. Often, they have heard about the project from other families that have worked with us or from their child's teacher. We have not advertised since the first year of operation. We have room for ten families each semester, and the need for our services is so great that advertising is unnecessary. (Several years ago, someone—I never learned who—made several public announcements about the project on a local radio station. I received 125 calls in one week.)

### **Starting the Journey: Training Teachers to Work with Families**

With these basic pieces in place, the project began. The major activities have, of course, evolved over the past ten years. For example, at first we did not offer the children's self-esteem building group. However, many parents noted on the project evaluation

**The first weeks are spent discussing common issues for families.**

form that one of the best outcomes was the increased self-esteem of their child. The parents believed that this change was occurring because their child *saw* other children at the project and realized that he or she was not the only one with learning difficulties. The self-esteem group was then implemented to provide the children with more extensive opportunities to discuss and understand their difficulties as well as to learn about each other's coping mechanisms and strengths.

What follows is a brief description of the current model. The first weeks are spent discussing common issues for families. For example, parents usually experience many strong emotions when their child is struggling in school. How they deal with these emotions varies. Many parents are fearful about what the future will hold for a child if he or she is twelve years old and barely able to read. There may be grieving, anger (at the school or child), confusion, denial. During these early weeks, the teachers begin to learn how to recognize the many faces of fear and how to support family members while providing them with useful information.

Because there are many aspects to the project, a set of 35 mm slides has been prepared to give teachers (and, later, parents) an overview of what we will be doing. A 420-page handbook I have developed is the primary text. It is supplemented with a continuing stream of new handouts as well as with readings from the books in our professional library.

**It is critically important to recognize the fears that new project teachers have.**

It is critically important to recognize the fears that new project teachers have when they are thrust into a situation unlike any other they have experienced. Teachers report feeling obligated to "produce a miracle"; they worry about "not having enough ideas" to help the family; they fear getting up in front of a group of adults. They even worry about the question, "What do I do if the child doesn't *have* a problem?"

One of the most helpful strategies has been to have teachers from the previous semester meet with the new group to discuss their own feelings and experiences while at the project.

**One of the most important learning outcomes . . . is learning to say "I've done the best I can" and being able to live with that.**

They usually start by saying, "You're feeling pretty overwhelmed right now, aren't you?" Invariably, they follow up with, "You're going to have one of the best experiences of your life." They discuss the process of "prepared risk-taking." For them this process includes having many resources available every step of the way: written resources, each other, and continual feedback and suggestions from me. A frequent remark is, "You are never alone, and you always know what is expected of you." They also share how they were able to move from feeling inadequate and anxious to successful, confident, and gratified.

It is very important at this stage to be honest with the teachers about the fact that not everyone will have the same level of success with his or her family. In our experience about one-third of the children will show astonishing success; another third will evidence satisfactory progress. However, the rest may improve only slightly because of the complexity or severity of their learning problems or, often, because of accompanying emotional or family difficulties. Because they are human, however, *all* teachers want to have the "miracle children." They struggle with their emotions when their family does not fall into that group, necessitating class discussions about perfectionism and about teachers as just one part of the ongoing development of children. But this may be one of the most important learning outcomes of the project for the student teachers; that is, learning to say "I've done the best I can" and being able to live with that.

### **Structuring the Clinical Weeks**

During the middle nine weeks of the semester, the families are with us one night a week for a portion of the evening. An overview of the schedule during those nights follows. The first hour is "class time," when I meet with the teachers as a group. During the second hour the teachers work with their individual families. For the final 45 minutes we split into two groups, the children's self-esteem building group and the parent support and discussion group.

During class time teachers share what they are doing individually with their families as well as any concerns and questions. This time is also used to discuss, analyze, and evaluate the children's and parents' groups from the previous week; to discuss what will be happening in groups that evening; and to plan for subsequent weeks. Taking time for reflection and planning helps the project run smoothly and provides one more strategy to alleviate the anxiety felt by teachers.

During the second hour, project teachers work with their families. A variety of activities may take place, depending on the skills targeted by the parents and the child's classroom teacher as the one(s) on which they would like us to focus. Thus, project teachers can be called on to demonstrate simple strategies to support the children's learning in any academic area at any grade level. (However, to maximize the likelihood of success, we pair families with project teachers whose backgrounds most closely match the children's needs.) Strategies might include tracing in salt for a child with spelling difficulties; using easily-found household items, such as buttons, to figure out mathematics problems; helping students with study skill problems by teaching them how to find and highlight key words and concepts; or using a simple four-part repetitive neurolinguistic approach while students are reading.

During the final 45 minutes of the evening, teachers work with the children's group or the parents' group. Each week two teachers as a team plan lessons to help the children feel capable, significant, powerful, and worthy (cf. Coopersmith, 1967). Some of the activities used to promote these components of self-esteem are role-playing, art, directed group sharing, and games such as the "Ungame" to encourage an exchange of information and feelings. Particularly helpful have been reading and discussing relevant children's literature, such as *Leo the Late Bloomer* (Kraus, 1971); *He's My Brother* (Lasker, 1974), about a sibling with learning disabilities; and *Eagle Eyes* (Gehret, 1991), about a child with attention deficit disorder. (See Schilling, 1986, for discussion of additional strategies and resources.)

During the first four weeks I lead the parent support and discussion group to model group facilitation strategies. After that time the group is led by two of the project teachers each week.

Different topics arise in the group, depending on the needs of the parents during any given semester. Among the more frequent topics are the following:

- Self-esteem—my child's and my own
- What *are* learning differences?
- Handling the homework wars
- How to get help at my child's school
- Legal rights
- Community resources

Roughly half of each session is used to present information. The rest is used to provide parents with a safe place to share their frustrations, pain, ideas, and triumphs.

Because the Parent Power course is used to satisfy teaching credential requirements, there are a number of competencies that student teachers must successfully complete. Those competencies are met through some of the activities already described as well as through the following:

- Reviewing and discussing current literature on family involvement
- Being involved in the collection of project research data
- Interviewing a family
- Going to the school with the family to interview the child's teacher
- Obtaining and reviewing school records with the family
- Assisting the family in the development of a resource notebook
- Writing weekly progress reports to the child's teacher
- Writing a final summary
- Planning and, when feasible, implementing parent involvement strategies at their own school sites

Teachers are also required to keep a journal that outlines the activities in which they are participating with their assigned family

**Teachers . . . keep a journal that outlines the activities in which they are participating with their assigned family.**

each week. The journal also includes reflections on their own feelings, questions, and concerns.

The final activity of the clinical experience is as important to the teachers as it is to the participating families. At the end of the ninth meeting, parents and teachers are asked to make a large circle, and the children are asked to sit on the floor in front of their parents. Each teacher then introduces his or her family, describing what each family member was seeking from the project, what the family did, and what progress has been made. Particular attention is paid to praising parents for the specific things they do that demonstrate how loving and effective they are as parents. Each child is similarly praised for specific skills and personal qualities. After a teacher completes this summary, the child is asked to turn and face his or her parents. Parents then speak directly to their children, sharing how they feel about them and what has been happening at the project. Finally, the children are asked to say something to their parents about their feelings concerning what has been happening at the project. This is usually a tear-filled, healing activity for families that have been struggling. It is a very emotional and important activity for the teachers as well. They have come to care very much for these families during the past weeks. This final sharing lets them see, most clearly, how deeply parents care for their children. This experience serves as an emotional catalyst for helping the teachers take the next step, which is commitment to starting family involvement activities at their own school sites.

**This final sharing lets them see, most clearly, how deeply parents care for their children.**

## **Extending the Journey for Teachers and Teacher Educators**

This is, in a way, a confession. Of the two frustrations that led to the founding of the project, the more urgent was the unserved need of the families whose pain came pouring through the telephone. So my primary objective in the beginning was to provide help to families whose children were struggling in school. From the start the project has accomplished that objective. To date approximately 950 parents and children have received services.

Typical comments on the evaluation forms completed by parents are, "She used to get so frustrated at herself and call herself dumb and stupid. I have not seen her do that since she's been with the project." "He was in the lowest reading group. . . . He can now READ and is eager to read."

One parent who addressed a statewide parent/professional conference concluded with these remarks:

Parent Power lightened the load I was carrying. I carried a guilt that my daughter's challenges were my fault. Maybe I didn't read to her enough when she was younger or somehow show her enough love. Maybe I failed at boosting her self-esteem. Parent Power helped me to realize I was a success as a parent, that my efforts on behalf of my child were not in vain, that I am my child's best advocate, and that if I don't pursue the necessary avenues of assistance that no one else will.

No wonder I am often heard to say that Parent Power is the most rewarding thing I have ever done professionally. So what is it that I have to confess? As the project evolved, I realized that, as satisfying as helping families is, my *primary* role is to prepare educators. Furthermore, the most important thing I can do for families is to prepare educators in such a way that they leave the project with the experience, confidence, materials, and willingness to initiate family involvement projects of their own. What Parent Power needed to be—and has become—was a trainer of trainers. As an example of this shift in focus, during the project's first year, we worked with families throughout the entire 16-week semester. Since then we have shortened that time to the present nine-week model. This change has allowed time to prepare students to continue, after the semester ends, on their own professional journeys to involve families. At present there are five major thrusts to this preparation: developing spin-off projects, documenting insights from program graduates, evaluating parent experiences and project effectiveness, completing related masters' theses, and continuing professional development activities. I will discuss each in turn, although it should be understood that each component builds on and enriches the others.



### Developing Spin-Off Projects

Development of spin-off projects begins after families leave the project. During the last weeks of the semester, students complete school-site surveys to determine what is already being done at their own schools or at their placement sites to involve families and which needs may still be unmet. They meet with or view videotapes of former project teachers, who talk about projects they started. (Currently, at least a dozen other projects are operating.)

For more ideas about what they might do at their schools, students read and review published materials on involving families. Some of the most useful are Canter and Canter (1991); Chrispeels, Boruta, and Daugherty (1988); Lontos (1992); and Swap (1993). A videotape of Joyce Epstein being interviewed about her research on parent involvement has also been helpful (San Diego County Office of Education, Administrator Training Center, 1986).

**Students are asked to design a realistic family involvement program for their particular job situation.**

At this point students are asked to design a realistic family involvement program for their particular job situation. Those not yet working professionally design something for their student teaching placement or for their most likely entry-level position.

They are asked to complete a form with the following questions:

- What do you want to accomplish with your program?
- What *kind* of support do you need?
- Whose support do you need, and how will you get it?
- How will you get families involved initially, and how will you keep them involved?
- What would it take for you to feel successful?

Their responses are discussed in job-alike groups composed of students who are teaching or planning to teach at similar grade levels or in similar settings (in regular or special education). Future plans are then discussed with the group as a whole. Usually, by this time some members of the group have begun to initiate activities at their school sites and are able to share their experiences with enthusiasm.

**I began . . . collecting data on the family involvement activities they have implemented on their own.**

### **Documenting and Using Insights of Former Project Teachers**

During the past eleven years, 250 of the most capable students from the School of Education have successfully completed the Parent Power course. (No student has ever dropped out.) Another 45 students have completed a summer Parent Power course—*Poder de Los Padres*—for Spanish-speaking parents of children with learning difficulties. Until now, follow-up of these graduates has been informal. However, during a recent sabbatical leave, I began systematically contacting all previous project teachers and collecting data on the family involvement activities they have implemented on their own. Questions focused on their preparation for these efforts, school-site support, problems encountered, and outcomes achieved. Of particular interest are the experiences of those who have successfully (or unsuccessfully) started full-fledged family involvement projects. In follow-up interviews, some striking consistencies emerged. They are worth sharing in some detail because little has been published to prepare educators to initiate family involvement activities.

Briefly, teachers who have begun such projects uniformly recommend the following:

1. Approach your principal with enthusiasm and a well-thought-out plan. This step is crucial. If you appear secure and confident, the principal is more likely to feel secure and confident as well. Regularly invite administrators to join a parent group session or at least to put in an appearance. This participation keeps them informed and communicates to parents that the group is important.
2. Get at least one other colleague to work with you. Otherwise, the project will seem overwhelming, and you won't continue.
3. Do a needs assessment with parents, asking which topics interest them, what meeting times are best, and whether babysitting or translators are needed.
4. If a teacher is in charge, have the group meet in the classroom. This arrangement is more comfortable and makes it clear that the teacher has initiated the group. One of the most common mistakes is to bring in professionals to talk on a stage in the auditorium—an approach that is too formal and impersonal.

5. Serve only your own students and their families until you know you have the support of other colleagues.
6. Publicize and communicate by telephone or in person. Distributing flyers is the least effective approach.
7. Realize that your students can (and will) "sell" the program. They can publicize events, plan activities, and make treats.
8. Use concrete incentives, such as snacks and take-home teaching materials.
9. Be aware of and sensitive to parents' feelings. For example, some parents are embarrassed because they have a lot of children and "fill up a classroom." Encourage them to come by saying, "We want to see your whole family."
10. Include "fun" times, such as picnics and play days. These activities help parents get to know teachers as people and foster the partnership.

**The experiences of these . . . teachers made me acutely aware of the need to prepare students better for the *political* aspects of innovation.**

The experiences of these former Parent Power teachers made me acutely aware of the need to prepare students better for the *political* aspects of innovation. For example, as a group they need to be helped to understand the "turf" issues reflected in points 1, 4, and 5 and the means to deal with them effectively. Handouts, videotapes, and slides have been prepared to assist with this need as well as with the other recommendations. Some teachers put this information to use immediately and report back to the group on their success. As the database and teaching materials continue to grow, efforts to prepare these preservice and in-service teachers to initiate new programs should become even more effective.

### **Evaluating Parent Experiences and Project Effectiveness**

Other kinds of research related to the Parent Power Project are now under way. Data are gathered from entry and exit questionnaires completed by project parents and through open-ended evaluation forms completed by project student teachers, parents, and the children's classroom teachers. We also administer a questionnaire on attitudes toward and experience with family involvement. This survey is completed by project parents, a sampling of other parents in area schools, project students, and other students in

the teacher education programs at California State University, Fresno. In addition, we are now audiotaping sessions with the class and with the parent support group. The transcripts of these tapes are a rich source of information about the belief systems, behaviors, and emotions of student teachers and parents.

These research efforts are important to student teachers because they give them the opportunity to be directly involved in the research process. The data also provide an excellent starting point for class discussion as well as information about the effectiveness of the project and ways to improve it.

### **Designing Master's Theses**

Numerous master's theses on family involvement have been completed by former project students—ten in the 1990-91 academic year alone. For example, Mary Ann Dorais designed a handbook for parents of children with learning disabilities that is deliberately free of educational jargon and incorporates many visual aids to assist parents from bilingual or low socioeconomic backgrounds. Judy Bridgemon produced an extensive set of highly creative materials to facilitate yearlong communication between kindergarten teachers and parents.

Others have designed and implemented parent involvement projects. Maria Zendejas' Parent Pride in Education, now in its seventh year, has translators for five different languages at its sessions. Debbie Takacs founded a project at her middle school and is involved in training teachers to start their own projects—the beginning of a third generation of Parent Power.

I require all masters' students, as part of their professional training, to disseminate information from their theses at conferences, staff development institutes, faculty in-service training sessions, and university classes. Students find this requirement useful because it gives them the experience of speaking before a group and provides networking opportunities. They also report a sense of professional recognition as well as accomplishment for having contributed to the field.

### Continuing Professional Development

Former project students are involved in a variety of other professional development activities. They write proposals for and obtain grants, strive for professional leadership positions (e.g., as mentor teachers or department heads), and undertake additional graduate training, including doctoral programs. They frequently state that their experiences at the project gave them the necessary confidence and courage to pursue these goals.

While I was on sabbatical leave, a former project teacher (who had gone on to start her own project after completing the course) stepped in as interim director of Parent Power—and served very capably. It was a valuable opportunity for me to be able to step back and observe the project in a more detached way. And it was reassuring to know that I am *not* irreplaceable—that the skills needed to run such a project can be learned and passed on.

### Reflecting on Curriculum Innovation

After years of successful experience with the project, the two frustrations I started out with have been greatly reduced. From my current vantage point, I sometimes wonder, “Why doesn’t everybody try something like this?” I recently have spent time reflecting on what innovation demands of us and on what it gives back.

### Innovation Requires Taking Risks

In 1985 I often wondered why I had embarked on such a course of action. The Parent Power Project (and the related summer project, *Poder de Los Padres*) began with almost universal predictions of failure from school personnel, colleagues, and parents. I was told that parents were too busy, did not care, or were not educated enough to support their children’s learning. I also heard predictions that teachers would not want to be involved, were not committed, and could not be effective working with parents. Fortunately, our experience would prove these statements wrong. But I didn’t know this when I had to appear before a school board to convince the members to grant the project permission to

**I also heard predictions that teachers would not want to be involved, were not committed, and could not be effective working with parents.**

operate and some space. The negative predictions, coupled with the possibility of public failure, made innovation scary.

Another risk is having one's intentions misread. In the beginning I received a number of telephone calls like the one from the principal who demanded to know if we were "political agitators." "Is Parent Power like Black Power?" he angrily inquired. Even now, innovation requires that we continually pay attention to maintaining good public relations.

### **Innovation Is Hard Work**

The more innovative a project is, the more work it requires. At Parent Power it has been necessary to continue creating teaching materials for the course because there is often little available that is relevant. The bureaucratic and political process of getting a course approved and supported takes time. Producing forms, recruiting, publicizing, and responding to an ever-increasing number of telephone calls are all time-consuming.

### **Innovation Requires Flexibility**

Just about anything can happen when something new is tried. Once, we arrived to find that we were locked out of the building for the night. On another occasion a Vietnam veteran felt safe enough to spill his painful memories about the war, including his use of drugs, to his high school daughter, who was developing a similar problem. During sessions of the parent support group, couples have decided to divorce—and others have decided to reconcile. Children throw up. Teachers have surgery and need to be temporarily replaced. One time a father called. He was in jail but pleaded with us not to give up his place, because he would return. And he did.

### **Innovation Must Be a Shared Experience**

Each of the challenges I have to face as an instructor attempting curricular innovation also has to be faced by the project teachers. For them to become comfortable with innovation, however,

they require a model. For this reason curriculum innovation must be a shared experience. Instructors and students must risk together, work together, flex together. As a result they will *learn* together. I was intrigued by an article (Morris, 1993) citing Betty Harragan, author of *Games Mother Never Taught You* (Harragan, 1977). Although Harragan was speaking about women, I think what she says applies to many who enter the field of education:

Taught to be honor students, they focus on preparation rather than improvisation. They won't go on stage until they've memorized the script forward and backward. But in a topsy-turvy world, even the best-prepared managers have to act without a script, confident that their knowledge, experience, and instincts will carry them through.

**The willingness of instructors to model "going on stage," even when they do not . . . have the script memorized, is the most effective way to encourage innovation.**

I believe that the willingness of instructors to model "going on stage," even when they do not—indeed, cannot—have the script memorized, is the most effective way to encourage innovation in those who would be tomorrow's educational leaders.

Together, the students and I have learned many things. We have learned not to rule anyone out. At the project we have worked successfully with parents who were third-generation heroin addicts or who had just lost another child because of a tragic accident or who were physically abusive or were themselves being abused by their child. Occasionally parents are *not* able to work effectively with their child (although this situation often changes once some success is experienced). In cases in which personality or language differences, work schedules, health problems, or heavy family responsibilities make participation in the program difficult, we try to enlist other family members, tutors, or babysitters. It is still important to discuss with the parents what they *can* do to help, such as offering words of encouragement to their child or providing a snack at homework time.

We have also found that there is no one right way to involve families because they come to us at different points in the process of learning how to help their child. Some need help in sorting out painful and conflicting emotions about themselves and their child. Most need information about the nature of learning difficulties,



**We have learned that we don't have to have answers to all the questions that we are asked.**

learning styles, and school and community resources. All appreciate additional specific suggestions about what they can do to support their child's learning.

We have learned that we will make some mistakes but that a "pure heart" invites forgiveness. We have learned that we don't have to have answers to all the questions that we are asked—but we can help families find them.

Many students report that they have learned not to prejudge parents:

Working with my family changed my ideas about how much parents do want to be involved and made me take a second look at myself and the prejudices and misconceptions I might have about families of different socioeconomic, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds.

Many report initial apprehensiveness about being prejudged themselves:

I think I had a very negative attitude about parents. I really didn't want them in my way. I just got done having professors critique me, and now I'm going to have parents coming into my room and checking up on me! This class has helped me see parents as wonderful resources and made me feel a lot more confident.

Speaking for all of us, one student observed:

I have learned that if I'm not getting the response I want, it's because the family hasn't grown to that response yet. It doesn't mean we can't make headway. I am just one of many, and the next teacher can pick it up. Hopefully, everybody will end up at the right place eventually. We just don't always see it come to full fruit.

### **Innovation Is an Evolutionary Process**

The Parent Power Project and my understanding of what it needs to accomplish continue to evolve (Evans-Schilling, 1992b, 1996). I have come to realize that just as parents come to the project at different points in the learning process, so too do student teachers.

At a meeting of the Parent Involvement Task Force organized by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, I pre-

sented a "Continuum of Family Involvement Training" that I continue to find useful in my own work. Briefly, it describes four stages and the kinds of information and activities needed by teachers at each stage:

- *Awareness*. Examples include personal and societal attitudes concerning involvement of family members in the learning of their children as well as attitudes toward families that are racially, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse
- *Information*. Examples include home-school communication strategies, legal rights of parents, and community resources
- *Experience*. Examples include direct work with families and schools to practice conferencing and group facilitation skills and to teach parents how to support their children's learning
- *Contribution to the field*. Examples include research, professional speaking and writing, and initiation of family involvement activities

I realize now that, not knowing any better eleven years ago, I plunged my student teachers headlong into the Experience stage of a clinical project. Because of their personal and professional strengths, they were successful; and I have had the pleasure of working with them as they have moved into the Contribution stage.

In the fall of 1994, I began teaching cohorts of bilingual special education interns (Chavez & Evans-Schilling, 1995). Most of these students are in their first teaching position and, in addition, are taking several courses each semester. The course I initially designed for them focused much more on the beginning stages of the continuum. However, I found that even these student teachers must move into activities at the Experience and Contribution to the Field levels to gain the attitudes and confidence necessary for effective work with families.

I have recently agreed to develop two additional courses, one for school administrators interested in family involvement and one

for undergraduates in a new joint regular/special education credential program. I am quite sure that teaching the courses will add new dimensions to an understanding of what the continuum encompasses and with it my knowledge of what it takes to prepare educators to work with families.

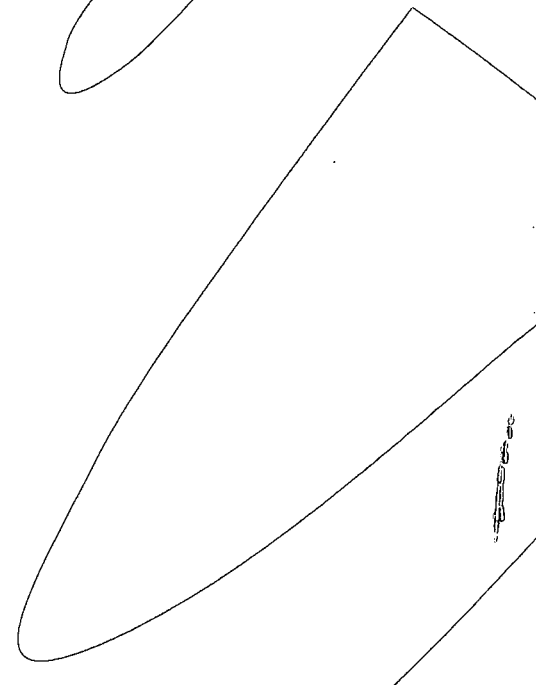
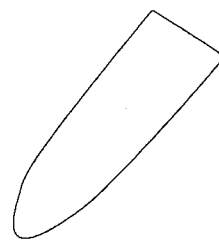
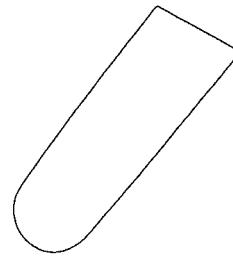
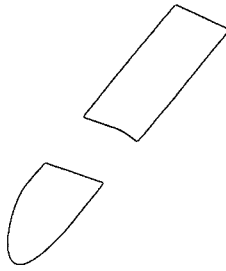
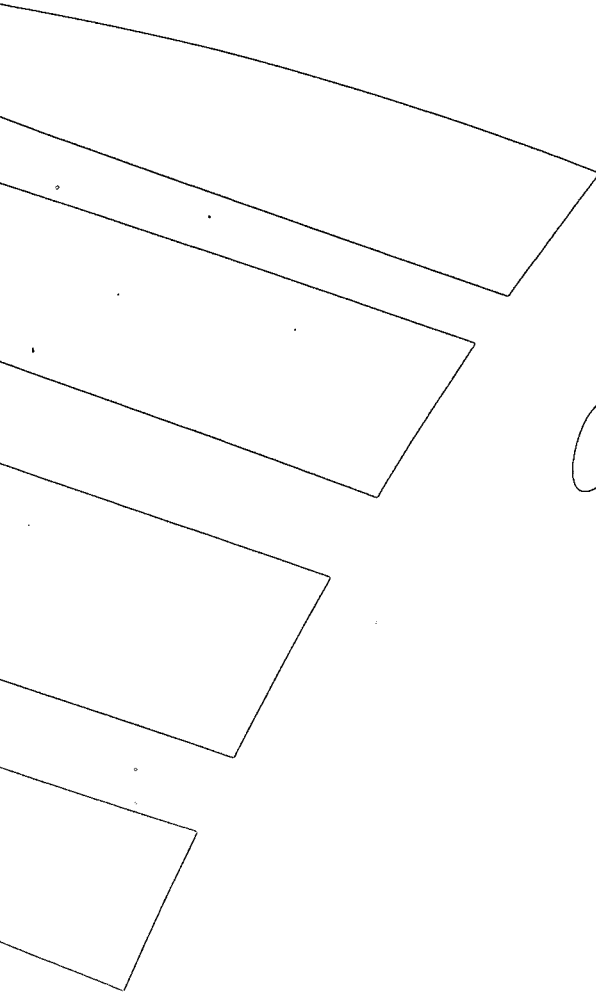
### **Innovation Is Gratifying**

Many of us probably entered the education profession because we wanted to make a difference in someone's life. Recently, at a large conference, three former students of mine presented information about the unique and successful projects they have initiated. To be able to watch these students grow personally and professionally to the point that I can watch *them* making a difference has been gratifying. To paraphrase Yeats: Filling buckets has its uses, but igniting commitment and creativity—lighting fires—is both more needed and more rewarding.

## **References**

- Canter, L., & Canter, M. (1991). *Parents on your side: A comprehensive parent involvement program for teachers*. Santa Monica, CA: Lee Canter & Assocs.
- Chavez, J. A., & Evans-Schilling, D. (1995). Preparing special education interns to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students. *Monograph No. 1 of the International Association of Special Education* (1995 Biennial Conference), pp. 290–294.
- Chrispeels, J., Boruta, M., & Daugherty, M. (1988). *Communicating with parents*. San Diego: San Diego County Office of Education.
- Coopersmith, S. (1967). *The antecedents of self-esteem*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.
- Evans-Schilling, D. (1992a). Developing more innovative curricula in teacher preparation programs. *Christa McAuliffe showcase for excellence. Developing models to enhance the teaching profession* (pp. 7–10). Washington, DC: American Association of State Colleges and Universities.
- Evans-Schilling, D. (1992b). Parent involvement projects: Models and strategies. In N. Gwalla-Ogisi, B. Reid, & B. Sexson (Eds.), *Relevant practices in special education: A challenge around the world*. (Proceedings of the Second Biennial Conference of the International Association of Special Education, pp. 161–168). Whitewater, WI: University of Wisconsin Continuing Education Services.

- Evans-Schilling, D. (1996). Preparing educators for family involvement: Reflections, research, and renewal. *Forum of Education*, 51, 35-46.
- Gehret, J. (1991). *Eagle eyes: A child's guide to paying attention*. Fairport, NY: Verbal Images Press.
- Harragan, B. (1977). *Games your mother never taught you: Corporate gamesmanship for women*. New York: Rawson Assocs.
- Kraus, R. (1971). *Leo the late bloomer*. New York: Windmill Books.
- Lasker, J. (1974). *He's my brother*. Chicago: Albert Whitman.
- Liontos, L. (1992). *At-risk families and schools*. Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management. ED 342055.
- Morris, M. (1993, February 15). Good girl: Stop following the rules. *Fresno Bee*, pp. E1, E3.
- San Diego County Office of Education, Administrator Training Center. (1986). *Home-school relations*. San Diego: San Diego County Office of Education. Videotape.
- Schilling, D. (1986). Self-esteem: Concerns, strategies, resources. *Academic Therapy*, 21, 301-307.
- Swap, S. (1993). *Developing home-school partnerships: From concepts to practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.



ISBN 0-8011-1442-X  
90000

9 780801 114427



**U.S. Department of Education**  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)  
National Library of Education (NLE)  
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



# REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

## I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: <i>Joining Hands: Preparing Teachers to make meaningful Home-School Connections</i>	
Author(s): <i>Edited by: Mary Sue Ammon</i>	
Corporate Source: <i>California Department of Education California Commission on Teacher Credentialing</i>	Publication Date: <i>1999</i>

## II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

*Sample*

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Level 1



Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

*Sample*

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A



Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

*Sample*

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B



Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.  
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign  
here,→  
please



Signature: <i>[Signature]</i>	Printed Name/Position/Title: <i>Sam W. Swafford, Ed.D. Executive Director</i>	
Organization/Address: <i>CA Commission on Teacher Credentialing 1900 Capitol Ave. Sacramento, CA 95814</i>	Telephone: <i>(916) 322-6253</i>	FAX: <i>(916) 445-0800</i>
	E-Mail Address:	Date: <i>1/20/00</i>

(over)

### III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:

Address:

Price:

### IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:

Address:

### V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON TEACHING  
AND TEACHER EDUCATION  
1307 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 300  
Washington, DC 20005-4701

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

**ERIC Processing and Reference Facility**  
1100 West Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Laurel, Maryland 20707-3598

Telephone: 301-497-4080  
Toll Free: 800-799-3742  
FAX: 301-953-0263  
e-mail: [ericfac@inet.ed.gov](mailto:ericfac@inet.ed.gov)  
WWW: <http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com>

EFF-088 (Rev. 9/97)